

The Russian Revolution and the Factories of Petrograd,
February 1917 to June 1918

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Submitted for the degree of PhD

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1980.

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SYNOPSIS

This thesis explores the ways in which the factory workers of Petrograd struggled between February 1917 and June 1918 to improve their position as workers and to democratise relations within the factories. It begins by examining the sociology of the factory workforce and posits the centrality of the division between a fully proletarianised minority of skilled, literate, male workers and the majority of low-paid, unskilled, peasant and women workers. These two groups had a different relationship to the labour movement during the revolution of 1917. Chapter 2 examines the position of workers within the tsarist factory, and chapter 3 the ways in which this position changed as a result of the overthrow of the autocracy in February 1917. Chapter 4 looks at the creation of the factory committees, their political complexion, and their activities in spheres as diverse as law and order, labour discipline and the campaign against drunkenness. Chapters 5 and 6 examine the political coloration of the trade unions, and the extent to which the two organisations were genuinely democratic. Chapters 7 and 8 analyse the battle by the factory committees for workers' control of production, challenging the Western interpretation of this battle as being inspired by anarcho-syndicalism, and interpreting it instead as an attempt to stem disorder in the economy and to preserve jobs. The debates about workers' control are surveyed, and chapter 10 shows how the terms of the debate about the roles of the factory committees and trade unions changed as a result of the Bolshevik seizure of power. Within the space of a few weeks, the movement for workers' control of production developed into a movement for workers' self-management and for the nationalisation of industry. In a context of mounting economic chaos, mammoth redundancies and plummeting labour discipline, the Bolshevik government decided that workers' self-management conflicted with the priority of raising productivity in industry. June 1918 saw a move to nationalise industry, but the end of the democratic experiment in workers' management.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Moshe Lewin, now of the University of Pennsylvania, who provided the inspiration for this work in its early stages, whilst I was a post-graduate at the Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Birmingham. I would like also to express my warm thanks to Mrs. Maureen Perrie, also of CREES, who supervised this work in its final stages. I am most grateful to the British Council for granting me an exchange studentship to Moscow University for the academic year 1976-77, and to Professor V.Z. Drobizhev of the Faculty of History of the University of Moscow, who gave me much help and advice. I wish to thank him and his wife for their hospitality. I would like to express my gratitude to the librarians of the INION and Lenin Libraries in Moscow, to the librarians of the newspaper room of the BAN Library in Leningrad in particular, and, most of all, to Mrs. Jenny Brine, librarian of the Baykov Library, CREES, University of Birmingham. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Essex for granting me study leave during the Autumn term of 1979.

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INTRODUCTION

This work aims to explore the impact of the Russian Revolution on factory life in Petrograd in 1917 and the early months of 1918. Originally, the aim was to explore the way in which the whole gamut of changes associated with the revolution - political, economic, social and cultural - affected the lives and consciousness of the Petrograd working class, and it was on this basis that most of the research was done. It became clear, however, that to do this satisfactorily would necessitate writing a work at least twice the length of the present one. It was therefore decided to concentrate on the 'economic' changes of 1917-18, and on the ways in which these affected the working lives of workers, pushing them into struggles around work and production.

It should be said at once that this work is, in no sense, an attempt to write history 'with the politics left out', to use Trevelyan's unfortunate description of social history. The Russian Revolution was centrally about politics - about the overthrow of the tsarist regime, about 'dual power' and about the experiment in popular soviet government. It is thus quite proper that both Soviet and Western historians should have focussed on the political developments of 1917. At the same time, they have necessarily tended towards an over-political history of the Russian Revolution, which does not give due place to changes in the economy, society and culture of Russia in these crucial years. The aim of the present work is not to write an 'economic' history, by separating economics from politics - a theoretically dubious exercise at the best of times - but to explore the inter-relationship of these two levels

of the social formation. Deliberately however, this account seeks to foreground the economic level, in order to set political developments in a new perspective. Thus the events and political parties and personages which dominate standard accounts of the Russian Revolution, recede into the background in the present work.

At the centre of our picture are the economic crisis, which first became manifest in the summer of 1917, and the 'economic' struggles of the working class. It is important not to fall into the trap of simply equating 'economic' struggles with struggles about wages and conditions. Within the capitalist factory capital dominates labour in two ways: firstly, it exploits labour because of its ownership of the means of production; secondly, it enforces the 'real subordination' of labour within the process of production, i.e. it constructs a system of power relations which can enforce the discipline of the labour process and thus ensure the creation of surplus value. Roughly speaking, to each of these types of domination there corresponds a specific type of working-class struggle: firstly, there are struggles around exploitation - sometimes called by Marx "struggles over the appropriation of the product" - which, in 1917, included the struggles led by the trade unions for higher wages; secondly, there are struggles around capitalist control of the process of production - sometimes called by Marx "struggles over the appropriation of nature" - which, in 1917, included the struggle for workers' control of production led by the factory committee.¹ It is misleading, in fact, to call these struggles "economic", for it tends to reinforce a dichotomy between 'economic' and 'political'

1. Marx, K., Capital, vol. 1, ch. 7, London: Penguin, 1976;
Stedman Jones, G., 'Class Struggles in the Industrial Revolution',
New Left Review, 90, March-April 1975, p.55.

struggles, such as Lenin proposed in What Is To Be Done? (1902).²

The whole experience of 1917 suggests the impossibility of positing such a dichotomy: one of the themes of the present work is to show how, in the course of a fight to preserve jobs and living standards, workers 'spontaneously' come to see the revolutionary political options offered by the Bolsheviks as the 'natural' solution to their immediate economic problems, as well as to the wider problems of war, governmental ineptitude and rural poverty. The relationship of workers to the different political parties is not examined, except in terms of the relationship of these parties to the factory committees and trade unions. The policies of the parties on 'economic' matters are analysed, but an attempt has been made to avoid duplicating the comprehensive accounts already available in English by P. Avrich, R. Devlin and E.H. Carr.³ Moreover an attempt has been made to avoid a detailed description of the role of factory workers in the major events of 1917 - the February Revolution, the July Days, the Kornilov rebellion and the October seizure of power - since excellent accounts are now available in the works of A. Rabinowitch, M. Ferro and J. Keep.⁴

2. Lenin, V.I., What Is To Be Done? Selected Works in two volumes, vol. 1, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1947.

3. Avrich, P., The Russian Revolution and the Factory Committees, Columbia University, Ph.D., 1962; Devlin, R.J., Petrograd workers and workers' factory committees, SUNY, Binghamton, Ph.D., 1976; Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, London, 1952 (Pelican edn. 1966).

4. Rabinowitch, A., Prelude to Revolution, Indiana University Press, 1968. Rabinowitch, A., The Bolsheviks Come to Power, New York, 1976. Ferro, M., The Russian Revolution of February 1917, London: Routledge, 1972. Ferro, M., October 1917, London: Routledge, 1980. Keep, J.H.L., The Russian Revolution: a study in mass mobilisation, London: Weidenfeld, 1976.

The present work focusses exclusively on the factory workers of Petrograd, since they comprised a majority of the city's labour force and since they constituted the base of the revolutionary movement. Non-factory workers such as railway workers, construction workers, shop workers, workers in public organisations, artisans etc. have been excluded from the scope of analysis. However, workers in railway repair shops are included, as are printers, in view of the fact that the average print works in Petrograd employed 240 workers, and the biggest ones some several thousand employees.⁵ Because the Petrograd proletariat has been mythologised in Soviet ideology in order to legitimate the social and political order of the Soviet Union, it is important to re-establish its historicity. We thus begin by trying to reconstruct in its complexity the historical and sociological specificity of the factory workforce of the capital on the eve of 1917.

My original hope, when commencing this research, was to study the archives of the major factories of Petrograd in depth. Although I was given permission by the Soviet authorities to work in the Leningrad archives in 1977, I was not allowed access to those factory archives which I wished to see, and was thus unable to make archival sources the main evidential base of this work. Most of my source material is drawn from an exhaustive reading of the socialist and trade-union press for 1917-18. The fine collections of archival and documentary material which have been published by Soviet scholars are used extensively, as are a wide range of secondary works by Soviet

5. Spisok fabrichno-zavodskikh predpriyatii Petrograda, Pg., 1918, pp. 7-16.

historians. I wish to record my indebtedness to these scholars.

I have called the capital of Russia by its historic name of 'Petersburg' when referring to the period before 18 August 1914. On that date, the tsarist government, in a fit of anti-German fervour, changed the name of the city to the less German-sounding 'Petrograd'. The Bolshevik party refused to go along with this chauvinism and continued to call its metropolitan organisation the Petersburg Committee in 1917. I have done likewise. Throughout this work I have used the old-style date of the Julian calendar, which was thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar. To avoid confusion, I have continued to use old-style dates even after 14 February 1918, when the new calendar was introduced. Finally, I have translated all Russian measures of weight into metric units.

1. A PROFILE OF THE PETROGRAD WORKING CLASS ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

A. PETROGRAD: THE CITY AND ITS INDUSTRY

Petrograd was a city of striking contrasts. It was the political, economic and cultural capital of Russia and yet in many ways a most unRussian city - more like Paris than Moscow. It was at once a symbol of tsarist power and of popular revolution. Here the Imperial Court headed an army of 70,000 civil servants; here in 1905 the first Soviet had headed a general strike. Along the avenues and canals of the city centre stood palaces, splendid emporia, banks and company offices. Across the river stood bleak tenements and teeming factories. Not a stone's throw from the University and the Academy of Sciences there lived thousands of people in appalling ignorance and misery. Petrograd was home to rich and poor, to a thriving revolutionary underground and to the Holy Synod, to the liberal opposition and to the Black Hundreds. Here in February 1917 a revolution erupted which was to have world-shattering implications.

In 1917 Petrograd had a population of 2.4 millions.¹ It was by far the largest city in a country where less than a fifth of the population lived in towns. It was the only city, apart from Moscow, with a population in excess of one million.² Between 1897 and 1914

1. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, Pg. 1920, p.10. Estimates vary from 2.3 million (Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie rabochego klassa Rossii, M. 1958, p.354) to 2.7 million (Strumilin, S.G., 'Obshchii obzor Severnoi oblasti', Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue I, Pg. 1918, p.17).

2. Rashin, A.G., Naselenie Rossii za sto let, M. 1956, pp. 25 and 97.

the population of the capital had grown from 1.26 million to 2.21 million - a very high rate of growth compared to the average for the Empire as a whole.³ By 1917 Russia had 182 million inhabitants, about 1½% of whom lived in the capital.⁴

Although the birth rate in Russia had declined since the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia still had one of the highest rates in Europe on the eve of the First World War, with 44 births per thousand of population.⁵ In Petrograd the rate was much lower, averaging 28.7 births per thousand of the population, but compared to most other capital cities in Europe this was a very high rate indeed.⁶ The relatively low birth rate in Petrograd compared to the national average reflected the lower marriage rate, the economic need to regulate family size in the towns and the general cultural pressures of urban life.⁷ During the war the birth rate in Petrograd, and in Russia as a whole, fell sharply, as it did in most belligerent countries.⁸

The death rate in Russia had fallen steadily since the mid-nineteenth century, when it averaged 35.9 per thousand of the population, to 28.5 in 1909-17. Nevertheless on the eve of the war Russia still had a far higher mortality than elsewhere in Europe, owing to the agrarian character of the society and the exceptionally high level of

3. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, p.10.

4. Strumilin, S.G., loc. cit.

5. Rashin, A.G., Naselenie, p.224.

6. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, pp. 10 and 17.

7. Not surprisingly the rate of illegitimate births was much higher in Petrograd than in the country as a whole. ibid., p.21.

8. ibid., p.19.

infant mortality.⁹ In Petrograd in the five-year period up to 1914 the death rate was 23.2, a figure considerably lower than the national average.¹⁰ Yet this was deceptive, for in almost every age-group, mortality was higher than the national average; but the preponderance of young adults in the population, together with the low proportion of children and elderly, depressed the overall death rate of the capital. Notwithstanding this, mortality in Petrograd was far higher than in other European cities. About a quarter of all babies born in the capital died before the age of one; and for those who survived childhood the biggest killers were tuberculosis, pneumonia, epidemics of typhoid, spotted fever and smallpox, and stomach and intestinal diseases.¹¹ As one would expect, the death rate was much higher in the poorer districts of the capital than in the wealthier ones. Whereas in 1915 the death rate per thousand in the working-class areas of Vyborg, Narva and Kolomenskoe was, respectively, 24.8, 22.8 and 26.3; in the aristocratic districts of Admiralteiskii, Liteinyi and Kazan it was, respectively, 8.7, 11.2 and 11.7.¹² During the war the death rate in Petrograd rose from 21.5 in 1914 to 25.2 in 1917, in spite of a fall in the number of infant deaths. This increase was due partly to the numbers of wounded and diseased soldiers who were transferred to the capital from the Front.¹³

In view of the lowish birth rate and the high death rate in

9. Rashin, A.G., Naselenie, pp. 5 and 225.

10. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, p.23.

11. ibid., p.33.

12. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda, Pg., 1916, p.11.

13. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, p.10.

Petrograd the rapid growth in the city's population after 1897 may seem puzzling, but it was almost entirely due to immigration from the countryside. In 1910 68% of the inhabitants of Petersburg had been born outside the city.¹⁴ The census of that year analysed the city's population by social estate (soslovie) as follows: 69% were classified as "peasants" (this category included industrial workers); 16% were "lower middle class" (meshchane) and 12% were hereditary or personal nobility, honorary citizens or merchants.¹⁵ The huge proportion of peasant migrants in the capital gave the city's population certain peculiar demographic features. Firstly, there was a numerical preponderance of men over women, which reflected the fact that more men than women left the countryside in search of work. The number of women migrants to Petrograd increased dramatically between 1900 and 1910, ^{but} there were still only 897 women to every thousand men in the city's population in 1915.¹⁶ Secondly, the proportion of children and teenagers in Petrograd was unusually low. According to the 1910 census, children under ten comprised 17% of the city's population, compared to 27% of the population of Russia as a whole. Young people aged ten to nineteen comprised 18.4% of the population as against 21.4% in the country as a whole. However the proportion of the Petrograd population in the age group 20 to 29 was higher than the national average - at 26% against 16%.¹⁷ Thirdly,

14. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda, p.9.

15. ibid., p.8.

16. ibid. In 1900 there were 578 female 'peasants' in Petrograd for every thousand males. Shuster, N.A., Peterburgskie rabochie v 1905-07gg. L. 1976, p.31.

17. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, p.25.

the immigrant character of the capital's population meant that single people outnumbered married. In 1910 58% of men were single and 39% were married; and 56% of women were single, 33% married and 11% widowed.¹⁸ On the eve of the war the marriage rate was only 6.2 per thousand of the population - a very low rate compared to other European capitals.¹⁹ The low rate was due partly to the fact that peasant migrants preferred to marry in their native villages; partly, to the still-restricted possibilities for female employment in industry; and, largely, to the economic impossibility for most male workers of supporting a family. Those who did marry, married late. Only 38% of men who married were under the age of 25.²⁰

All in all, the demographic patterns of Petrograd's population were highly distinctive, compared to both the national pattern and to that of capital cities in Western Europe. A majority of the population were peasants who had migrated from the countryside, most being single men in their twenties. It was they who boosted the city's population so dramatically in the decade before 1914.

Petrograd as an Economic Centre

Industrialisation had made impressive progress in Russia since "take-off" in the 1890's. Gerschenkron estimates that industrial output was growing by 7½% per annum between 1905 and 1914. By that date Russia stood fifth in the league table of industrial nations.²¹

18. Statisticheskije dannye Petrograda, p.9.

19. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue I, pp. 11-12.

20. ibid., p.16. This compared to 68% in the country as a whole. Rashin, A.G., Naselenie, p.174.

21. Gerschenkron, A., 'Problems and Patterns of Russian Economic Development' in Black, C.E., The Transformation of Russian Society, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960, p.54.

As yet, however, she was far from being a fully industrialised country. In terms of volume of industrial output, France produced 2.5 times as much as Russia in 1914; Britain 4.6 times as much; Germany six times as much and the USA 14.3 times as much.²² Per capita real income in Russia was only half that of Germany and a third that of the USA and Britain.²³ Agriculture still employed two-thirds of the population and accounted for 45% of national income, whereas manufacture and mining accounted for not more than one fifth of national income and employed about 3.3 million people in 1913.²⁴ In view of this, it is difficult to concur with Soviet historians that Russia had reached the "highest", imperialist stage of capitalist development by the time of the First World War. Nevertheless capitalism in Russia was remarkable for the manner in which it combined primitive forms of capitalist production, such as rural commodity production, manufacture and small factory production, with the most modern forms of monopoly and state-capitalist production. And it was above all in Petrograd that the most advanced forms of capitalist production were to be found.

Petrograd was first and foremost a banking and financial centre. As Russia's citadel of finance capital it controlled the metal and coal industries of the South, the oil industry of Baku, Urals copper, Siberian gold, South-Western sugar, Turkestan cotton and

22. Lyashchenko, P.I., History of the National Economy of Russia, Herman, L.M., transl., New York: Macmillan, 1949, p.674.

23. Crisp, O., Studies in the Russian Economy before 1914, London: Macmillan, 1976, p.5.

24. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.171.

Volga steamships.²⁵ The major banks in Petrograd were the Russian-Asiatic bank, which financed 21 metal, engineering and tobacco companies; the Discount and Loan bank, which financed the Noblessner engineering group, the American-Russian rubber company and the Skorokhod shoe company; the International bank, which financed the electrical syndicates Elektroprovod and Semaphore, and the Azov-Don bank.²⁶ By April 1917 the assets of the private commercial banks of Petrograd amounted to 11 milliard rubles, or three-quarters of the entire assets of Russia's private banks.²⁷ In addition, the State Bank, which had some 200 offices throughout the Empire and was the only bank to issue currency, had its headquarters in the capital.²⁸

As much as two-thirds of the assets of the commercial banks were foreign-owned, and in industry, too, foreign capital played a significant part, with about a third of corporate and debenture investments owned by foreign companies.²⁹ The bulk of this foreign capital was invested in mining (90% of total capital investment), metallurgy (42%) and chemicals (50%).³⁰ France controlled about a third of total foreign investments in both banking and industry; Britain 23%; Germany 20%; Belgium 14% and the USA 16%.³¹ During the war, foreign control of Petrograd industry was slightly reduced when

25. Volobuev, P.V., Proletariat i burzhuziia Rossii v 1917g., M. 1964, p.47.

26. Valk, S.N. et al., ed., Oktyabr'skoe Vooruzhennoe Vosstanie, Vol. I, L. 1967, pp. 419-21.

27. ibid., p.392.

28. ibid., p.415.

29. Lyashchenko, P.I., op. cit., p.714.

30. ibid., p.716.

31. Falkus, M.E., The Industrialisation of Russia, 1700-1914, London: Macmillan, 1972, p.71.

seven joint-stock companies, with a fixed capital of over 80 million rubles, were sequestered by the government because of their German connections. By 1917 fifteen Petrograd companies, with a fixed capital of 70 million rubles, were completely foreign-owned.³² This does not represent a foreign strangle-hold, however, when considered against the total of 2242 million rubles of foreign capital invested in Russian banking and industry at this time.³³ More important than foreign capital in the wartime industry of Petrograd was the role played by the state.

With the outbreak of war in 1914 Petrograd became the major centre of armaments production. Its industry was drastically revamped to meet two-thirds of the nation's defence requirements. Industrial output in the capital doubled between 1914 and 1917, and in 1916 alone its factories carried out military orders worth 1.5 million rubles. In the metalworking industry 81% of enterprises and 98% of the work-force worked exclusively on war orders.³⁴ This boom in production engendered a transformation in the organisation of Petrograd industry. From the time of the industrial crisis of 1900-03 monopoly organisation had been developing in Petrograd industry. These monopolies, unlike the German cartels, were syndicates concerned with marketing rather than larger, more concentrated units of production. By 1914 there

32. Oktyabr'skoe Vooruzhennoe Vosstanie, vol. I, p.423.

33. This is the figure calculated by P. Ol' and is probably on the high side. Falkus, M.E., op. cit., p.71.

34. Valk, S.N., et al., ed., Istoriya rabochikh Leningrada, vol. I, L. 1972, p.463; Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue I, Pg. 1918, p.18.

were over 150 such syndicates in Russia, covering mainly the mining and metallurgical sectors and some branches of light industry such as cotton textiles.³⁵ The First World War gave a boost to this process of monopolisation, creating a tight nexus between monopolies, finance capital and state orders. By 1917 sixty of the largest firms in Petrograd were organised into syndicates and trusts. The Russian-Asiatic bank organised a War Industries syndicate which contracted orders with the Baranovskii engineering company, the Russian Optical Company and the Russian Company for the Manufacture of Shells and Military Supplies. The Discount and Loan bank sponsored a syndicate under the name of Noblessner, which embraced the Nobel, United Cable, Phoenix and Atlas companies. Snaryadosoyuz was a private syndicate, comprising six firms, which produced shells directly for the Artillery Department. The transport engineering syndicates Prodpavoz and Prodvagon were treated by the Ministry of Communications more or less as official government contractors. And S.N. Vankov headed a state-capitalist organisation which produced three-inch shells directly for the Artillery Department by sub-contracting orders to four large companies in Petrograd.³⁶

While the government farmed out orders for shells, fuses and certain types of Ordnance to private firms, it procured most of its cartridges, revolvers, machine-guns and other kinds of ordnance from state factories. From its foundation St. Petersburg had been a major centre of government-sponsored industry. By 1917 there were 31 state-

35. Falkus, M.E., op. cit., pp. 77-8.

36. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie, pp. 403-5.

owned or state-controlled enterprises in Petrograd, compared to only one in Moscow.³⁷ These state factories employed a total of 134,464 workers in January 1917, i.e. over a third of the workforce of the capital. Ten of the state enterprises were run by the Artillery Administration and employed a total workforce of 53,000. The largest of these was the Pipe (Trubochnyi) Works) which had a workforce of 20,547 in January 1917, making time-fuses, percussion caps and explosives, and the Cartridge (Patronnyi) Works, which employed over 10,000 workers making rifle and revolver cartridges. Five state enterprises were run by the Naval Ministry and employed a total of 36,000 workers. Of these the largest was the Obukhov steel works which employed 12,954 workers at the beginning of 1917. It produced cast-iron, steel and copper mouldings, shells, mines and types of artillery which were beyond the means of the state gun factory in Perm. The Baltic shipyard - also under the Naval Ministry - employed 7,645 workers at the beginning of 1917 and produced battleships, submarines, mine-layers etc. A third category of state enterprises were the railway engineering and repair shops. The largest of these were the repair shop on the North-Western railway and the carriage and steam-engine shops on the Nikolaev line, which each employed over 2,000 workers.³⁸ In addition to these state-owned factories there were a number of companies which were state-controlled, though not state-owned. In February 1916 the government had sequestered the Putilov works, with its massive workforce of around 30,000, and

37. Gaponenko, L.S., Rabochii Klass Rossii v 1917g., M. 1970, p.51.

38. Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1961, no. 5, pp. 158-165; Spisok Fabrichno-zavodskikh predpriyatii Petrograda, Pg., 1918.

the Nevskii shipbuilding works. The government appointed new boards to both companies but both continued to be privately owned (Putilov share prices were quoted on the stock exchange index) and both continued to receive credit from the Russian-Asiatic bank. In a less dramatic move, the Ministry of Trade and Industry took a 35% share in the German-owned Siemens company in order to control its operations more effectively.³⁹

A further feature of Petrograd industry was its advanced technology. From the beginning of industrial "take-off" in the 1890's most branches of industry in Petrograd were heavily mechanised. This was probably a response to the relatively high labour-unit costs of Russian industry, due not to high wages but to the high cost of raw materials and marketing and to the relatively restricted market for sales.⁴⁰ During the boom of 1907 to 1913 considerable technological innovation and concentration of production took place in the metal industries of the capital, as demand for industrial and agricultural equipment increased. Government-sponsored shipbuilding replaced the railways as an outlet for Petrograd's engineering products. Between 1908 and 1912 the output of engineering works in Russia increased by 54%.⁴¹ By 1914 Petrograd industry had attained a high level of technological sophistication. Its largest firms lagged little behind those of Western Europe and many exchanged

39. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie, pp. 408-9.

40. Crisp, O., 'Labour and Industrialisation in Russia', Cambridge Economic History of Europe, Vol. VII, part 2, Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 404.

41. Gerschenkron, A., Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P., 1962, pp. 135-8; Rozenfeld, Ya. S., and Klimenko, K.I., Istoriya mashinostroeniya SSSR, M. 1961, p.96.

technical information and patents with companies in the West. Putilov, for example, had agreements with the Schneider company, Armstrong-Whitworth, Paul Girault and A.G. Duisburg.⁴² However, there was considerable variation in technological level between industries. Machine-tool construction and general machine-construction were somewhat backward technically compared to the electro-technical and engine-building industries which were extremely up-to-date.⁴³ This variation extended to individual factories. Contemporaries noted the contrast between two neighbouring metal works on Vyborg Side. The Phoenix works, whose director was English, was the first specialised machine-tool works in Russia, producing steam-engine, lathes, planing and mortising machines, while next door the Rozenkrantz works mixed copper-zinc alloys in extremely primitive fashion.⁴⁴

The technical efficiency of Petrograd industry was put to stringent test by the war and on the whole was not found wanting.⁴⁵ Enterprises were reorganised and re-equipped and massive amounts of capital were injected into them. Mass production techniques were introduced in the armaments factories and in some machine-construction plants. The conversion of private factories to production of shells, hand grenades, detonators, mortars etc. was very successful. Production of guns was less successful but adequate. Most engineering

42. Kruze, E.E., Polozhenie rabocheho Klassa Rossii v 1900-14 gg., L. 1976, p.127.

43. Rozenfeld, Ya. S., op. cit., pp. 102, 105, 109.

44. Vyborgskaya Storona, L. 1957, p.4.

45. Grinevetskii, V.I., Poslevoennye perspektivy russkoi promyshlennosti, M. 1918, p.46.

industries coped well but could not always meet demand. Production of engines increased and simple machine-tool production expanded both quantitatively and qualitatively. Production of automobiles and aircraft began, although production of precision instruments remained weakly developed.⁴⁶ In spite of some weaknesses, Petrograd factories managed to satiate the voracious appetite of the war machine until the second half of 1916, when they began to find it increasingly hard to maintain output in the teeth of declining supplies of fuel and raw materials and growing disorganisation in the transport system.⁴⁷ Nevertheless in the spring of 1917 Petrograd was still producing 22% of Russia's total industrial output.⁴⁸

On the eve of the Russian Revolution, therefore, the structure of industry in Petrograd was altogether remarkable, unparalleled except in Germany. Petrograd represented an island of technologically-sophisticated state-monopoly capitalism in a country whose mode of production still consisted in the main of rudimentary capitalist and pre-capitalist forms, albeit under the overall dominance of large capital. The economy of the city was being convulsed by a colossal boom which was entirely a consequence of the slaughter daily taking place on the Eastern Front. Yet war could not go on for ever: — this was an economy living off borrowed time. As soon as the mighty powers had glutted themselves with carnage and destruction, the economy of Petrograd would deflate like a pricked balloon. No end to the war was as yet in sight, but already the signs of imminent collapse were unmistakeable.

46. Rozenfeld, Ya. S., op. cit., pp. 116, 123.

47. Lyashchenko, P.I., op. cit., p. 762.

48. Istoriya rabocheho klāssa Leningrada, vol. I, p.462.

B. THE SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKFORCE IN 1917

i. Distribution by Industry

Between 1862 and 1913 the factory workforce of St. Petersburg multiplied by a factor of 6.5. In 1890 there were 73,200 factory workers in the capital; in 1902 already 137,400; in 1908 158,152 and by 1914, 242,600.⁴⁹ Between 1914 and 1917 the city's industrial workforce grew by 150,000 (60%) to reach 392,800, or 417,000 if one includes the factories situated on the outskirts of the city.⁵⁰ This wartime increase in the size of the workforce was far greater than the growth of the industrial workforce in Russia as a whole, which equalled 16%.⁵¹ By 1917 about 12% of Russia's 3.4 million industrial workers toiled in the factories of Petrograd.⁵² During the first half of 1917 the number of workers in the capital continued to grow - possibly by as much as 10% - as production for the war continued. As the economic crisis set in, however, in the summer of 1917, the workforce began to contract.⁵³

The huge expansion of the Petrograd workforce between 1914 and 1917 took place almost entirely in industries producing for the war effort. In the metal industry the workforce grew by 135%; in chemicals

49. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.196.

50. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provdeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L. 1965, pp. 25-26.

51. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.82.

52. Rabochii klass i rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v 1917g., M. 1964, p.75.

53. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.83.

by 99% and in clothing by 44%. In textiles the workforce remained constant in size, and in the food, printing and paper industries the workforce shrank.⁵⁴ By 1917 the distribution of the Petrograd workforce by industry was as follows:

Table 1

Branch of Industry	Number of enterprises	Number of workers	% of total workforce
Metalworking	379	237369	60.4
Textiles	100	44115	11.2
Chemicals	58	40087	10.2
Printing and Paper	218	26481	6.8
Food	70	15773	4.0
Woodworking	81	6754	1.7
Leather and footwear	50	12627	3.2
Minerals	32	3900	1.0
Miscellaneous	23	5722	1.5
Total	1011	392828	100.0

Source: Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya Oktyabr'skogo Vooruzhennogo Vosstaniya M.L. 1965, p.29. (Based on data in Spisok fabrichno-zavodskikh predpriyatii Petrograda, Pg. 1918.)

The most striking feature of this table is the extraordinary paramountcy of metalworkers. Whereas metalworkers had comprised only one third of the workforce in 1908, nine years later they comprised almost two-thirds.⁵⁵ In the same period textileworkers grew in

54. Rabochii Klass i rabochee dvizhenie, p.76.

55. Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie rabochie v 1912-14gg., M.L. 1961, p.69.

Table 2

% DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS IN PETROGRAD ACCORDING TO SIZE OF ENTERPRISE

Year	Enterprises of under 50 workers	Enterprises of 51 to 100 workers	Enterprises of 101 to 500 workers	Enterprises of 501 to 1000 workers	Enterprises of over 1000 workers
Average for 1901-1905 ¹	6.7%	8.1%	31.8%	15.5%	37.9%
1906 ²	7.0%	7.2%	31.3%	18.6%	36.5%
1910 ²	6.8%	7.3%	31.0%	19.4%	35.5%
1914 ² [1913] ³	5.6% [5%]	5.6% [5%]	24.8% [20%]	14.8% [15%]	49.2% [55%]
1917 ⁴	3.0%	3.2%	15.9%	10.0%	67.9%

1. These figures are based on data on enterprises under the Factory Inspectorate in the whole of Petersburg province.
Source: Semanov, S.N., Peterburgskie rabochienakanune pervoi russkoi revolyutsii, M.L. 1966, p.37.

2. These figures are based on data on enterprises under the Factory Inspectorate in the whole of Petersburg guberniya.
Source: Davidenko, A.I., "K voprosu o chislennosti i sostave proletariata Peterburga v nachale XX veka", Istoriya rabochego klassa Leningrada, issue II, L. 1963, pp. 98-99.

3. The figures in square brackets are based on data on enterprises under the Factory Inspectorate and the government in the city of Petrograd. Source: Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie rabochie v 1912-14gg., M.L. 1961, p.71.

4. These figures are based on enterprises, both private and state, in the city of Petrograd and its suburbs.
Source: Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie rabochego Klassa Rossii, M. 1958, p.105.

number but as a proportion of the workforce dwindled from 22% to 11%.⁵⁶

Russia was renowned for its large factories. The large scale of production units reflected the high level of technological and monopoly-capitalist development of its industry. In 1914 54% of Russian workers were employed in factories of over 500 workers, compared to 32.5% of workers in the USA.⁵⁷ In Petrograd the degree of concentration of workers was much higher. By 1917 there was an average of 409 workers in each enterprise (including the suburbs) - 40% more than the average for Russian factories in general.⁵⁸ No less than 70% of workers in Petrograd were employed in factories with workforces of over 1000, two-thirds of their number working in 38 large enterprises of more than 2000 workers each.⁵⁹ It is apparent from Table 2 that the trend towards concentration of plant size was a long-term trend which was merely intensified by the war. In the metal industry concentration of workers was especially high, averaging 2404 workers per enterprise. In state enterprises the average workforce was 5131 workers.⁶⁰ Textile production was smaller in scale, yet in Petrograd in 1917, 78% of textile workers worked in 25 mills with an average workforce of 1372 workers.⁶¹ This suggests that concentration

56. Davidenko, A.I., 'K voprosu o chislennosti i sostave proletariata Peterburga v nachale XX veka', Istoriya rabocheho klassa Leningrada, issue II, L. 1963, p.97; Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, p.69.

57. Gaponenko, L.S., op. cit., p.88.

58. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.32.

59. ibid.

60. ibid., p.33.

61. ibid.

in large units may not be the key factor explaining the greater militancy of metalworkers relative to textileworkers in 1917.

Petrograd was quite unique in the world at this time in having so large a proportion of its workforce concentrated in such vast enterprises. It was also unique in Russian terms in that the majority of its workers were actually factory workers. Although the working population of Petrograd totalled well over half a million by 1917 (taking into account workers in the transport, construction and retail sectors and in small workshops) a majority were employed in factories.⁶² In Moscow, in contrast, only 46% of the city's working population worked in factories, and in spite of the fact that half the factory workforce worked in factories with more than 500 workers, the size of the median factory was only 51.⁶³ In Kiev and the other major cities of Russia a majority of wage workers still worked in artisanal enterprises.⁶⁴ Petrograd was thus a striking exception to the national pattern.

ii. Spatial Distribution of the Working Class

86% of the workforce of Petrograd province lived in the city or its suburbs, which meant that the working class of this North-Western region was unusually urban by Russian standards.⁶⁵ Most of the city's

62. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue I, Pg. 1918, p.17.

63. Koenker, D., Moscow Workers in 1917, vols I and II, University of Michigan, Ph.D., 1976, p.24; Grunt, A. Ya., Moskva - 1917: revolyutsiya i kontrrevolyutsiya, M. 1976, pp. 32-33.

64. Naumov, G., Byudzhety rabochikh goroda Kieva, Kiev 1914.

65. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue I, p.11. Only 51% of the workforce in Moscow province lived in the city itself.

workers lived in the proletarian districts which encircled the central part of the city - on Vyborg Side, in the Narva, Nevskii and Moscow districts, on Vasilevskii Island and on Petrograd Side. Following the police classification of city districts, one can pinpoint the proletarian areas of the capital as being: Vyborg, Narva, Peterhof (where the Putilov works was situated), Aleksandrovskii (Nevskaya Zastava), Okhta, Novoderevenskii, Lesnoi and Polyuostrovskii. Just outside the city were the factory villages of Shlissel'burg, Kolpino and Sestroretsk. On the whole, the proletarian districts were fairly close to one another, for Petrograd was a compact city.

In the central part of the city - along Nevskii Prospekt, the river Neva and the Moika and Fontanka canals - the wealthy classes lived and government offices, banks and companies had their headquarters. In social terms, the proletarian and aristocratic districts were worlds apart, but in terms of distance they were very close to one another. One only had to cross the Alexander II bridge (Liteinyi bridge) from Vyborg Side to arrive at the Central Law Courts, and from there it was but a stone's throw to Nevskii Prospekt. On Vasilevskii Island the poor inhabitants of the Gavan' and of Mal'yi and Srednyi Prospekts lived cheek-by-jowl with the officials and intelligentsia of Bolshoi Prospekt. The shocking contrast between the living conditions of the well-to-do and the poor, coupled to their close proximity, was striking testimony to the reality of class division in Petrograd society. The social visibility of this division was almost certainly a factor promoting class consciousness on the part of the working masses.

Conditions in the working-class districts were sordid and filthy. In 1920 42% of homes in Petrograd were without a water supply or sewage system. Needless to say, these were mainly in the Nevskii, Moscow, Peterhof and Vyborg districts.⁶⁶ Rubbish in the streets and open cesspools were a constant health hazard. Such water supply as there was was frequently contaminated by ordure and industrial pollution (the river Neva was heavily polluted): cholera and typhus were the inevitable result. No proper roads or pavements existed in working-class areas, which meant that public thoroughfares turned into quagmires of mud during winter. Street lighting was extremely bad or non-existent. Housing was squalid. Open spaces were few. Overcrowding was rife. The chairman of the Vyborg district duma sanitation committee claimed that local residents had less space than those buried in the nearby cemetery.⁶⁷ Population density in the proletarian areas was two to four times that in inner-city areas. Around the Putilov works there sprawled a fetid slum. Here an average of 4.1 people lived in each rented room; in the third sub-district of Aleksandro-Nevskii area the corresponding figure was 4.6.⁶⁸ In 1900 a survey of 23,000 people living in shared accommodation showed that an average of 5.6 people lived in each room and that a fifth of such rooms were damp and a quarter inadequately ventilated.⁶⁹

According to S.N. Prokopovich's survey of 1908, only a quarter of workers could afford to rent a flat of one or two rooms, and those who could, usually sub-let a part of it. About 70% of single workers

67. Vyborgskaya Storona, p.11.

68. Semanov, S.N., Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune pervoi russkoi revolyutsii, M.L. 1966, p.152.

69. ibid., p.161.

and 40% of workers with families lived in shared rooms. Many single workers made do with just a bunk, which they shared with workers on other shifts.⁷⁰ In 1912 150,000 people lived in shared rooms and during the war the number increased.⁷¹ In Petrograd only a small proportion of workers lived in barracks accommodation or on factory premises (7% in 1918); this was in contrast to factories in rural areas, where such accommodation was common.⁷²

Although the standard of rented accommodation was frightful, it was by no means cheap. Rents in Petrograd were amongst the highest in Europe. Around the turn of the century it cost between 100 and 300 rubles a month to rent a flat; a room cost six to eight rubles a month and a bunk cost one-and-a-half to four rubles a month (proportionately much more than a room).⁷³ In the decade up to 1914 rents rose by 30% on average and then during the war they spiralled - doubling and trebling in less than three years.⁷⁴ Rents were high owing to the desperate shortage of accommodation in the city, caused not so much by too little building (land speculation and a construction boom were transforming the face of the city in the decade prior to the war) as by massive immigration into the capital.

70. Prokopovich, S.N., Byudzhety peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg., 1909, p.10.

71. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.58.

72. ibid., p.59.

73. Semanov, S.N., op. cit., pp. 154-5, 163.

74. Istoriya rabocheho klassa Leningrada, vol. I, p.409; Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.59.

C. THE SOCIAL COMPOSITION OF THE PETROGRAD WORKING CLASS

i) Peasant Workers and "Cadre" Workers

The industrial labour force in Russia was recruited overwhelmingly from the countryside. The working class thus had a peculiar 'peasant' character which distinguished it from most West European working classes whose roots were more urban and artisanal. Whether one can even speak of a 'working class' in the Russian context prior to the revolution is a controversial question, and one that has been a bone of contention among historians since the time of the Narodniks.

Basically, within the working class there were two broad social groups. The first consisted of peasants who had been driven from the land by poverty, who had come to work in the factories and who still retained strong ties with the countryside. The second consisted of what Soviet historians like to call 'cadre' (Kadrovye) workers who lived solely by wage work in industry and who were fully socialised into factory life; these workers were either peasants who had become proletarianised by severing their links with agriculture and by serving many years in the factory or else they were hereditary workers who had been born into working class families.

The historical controversy in essence revolves around two related problems: firstly, what was the relative weight of each of these groups within the labour force (did peasant workers outnumber "cadres"?); secondly, was a process of proletarianisation underway, whereby peasants were loosening their ties with the land and becoming conscious members of the working class. What follows is an attempt to explore these questions in relation to the Petrograd working class between

1900 and 1917.

Hundreds of thousands of peasants migrated to Petrograd between the 1861 Emancipation Act and the 1917 Revolution. They were forced from the land by overpopulation, land scarcity, indebtedness and general poverty. Landless and poor peasants comprised a majority of migrants, but many middling and some well-to-do peasants joined them. Few left their villages with the intention of cutting their ties with the land for good. The aim was to find off-farm work which would provide enough money to make the family farm financially viable. Most migrants tried to find work in agriculture, forestry, construction etc. since this was more congenial than factory work. Many ended up, inevitably, in factories. Factory work did not necessarily "proletarianise" these peasant migrants. Many stayed in the factories only during the winter months, returning to their native villages in the summer to help with the harvest. Others stayed for several years but then returned to their families in the countryside. In some areas such as Tula and Moscow factory work had the paradoxical effect of preserving peasant society by providing money to keep family farms intact.⁷⁵

Peasants who migrated to Petrograd came from provinces distant from the capital, whereas in Moscow they came from provinces close by. Most came from the non-black-earth central provinces and from the North-Western provinces, particularly from Tver, Pskov, Vitebsk, Novgorod, Smolensk, Kostroma, Vilna, Yaroslavl' and Ryazan'. Only about 8% came from Petrograd province itself.⁷⁶ It was common for

75. Munting, R., 'Outside Earnings in the Russian Peasant Farm: the case of Tula province, 1900-17', Journal of Peasant Studies, 1976, no.3, p.444; Johnston, R.E., Peasant and Proletarian, Leicester University Press, 1979.

76. Shuster, N.A., Peterburgskie rabochie v 1905-7gg., L. 1976, p.18; Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.40.

peasants from the same locality to work in the same factory, for it was difficult to get taken on in a factory unless one had inside connections (zemlyaki). At the Baltic works, for example, many workers came from Tver province and in the boat shop most came from Staritskii uezd within that province, since the foreman was a native of the area. At the Triangle Works there were large numbers of workers from Vasilevskii volost' in Tver uezd, Tver province.⁷⁷

For administrative purposes all the common people were classified as "peasants", according to the traditional system of social estates (soslovie). In 1900 908,800 "peasants" lived in St. Petersburg, but 21% had been born there and a further 28%, who had migrated from the countryside, had lived there for ten or more years. By 1910, 25% of Petersburg's 1.3 million "peasants" had been born in the capital and a further 25% had lived there for ten or more years.⁷⁸ Thus only about half of these "peasants" were recent migrants from the land.

Strictly speaking, the "peasant worker" was a distinct social type occupying a contradictory class position which straddles two modes of production. In this sense, only those factory workers who derived material benefit from farming land in the countryside were "peasant workers". In practice, however, it was not easy to isolate the peasant worker, since ties to the land could take a multitude of forms. It was common, for example, for a peasant to migrate to the factory but leave behind his family (wife and children or parents and extended family) to farm the family plot of land. Even if the family

77. Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.21.

78. My calculations based on Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.129; Ivanov, L.M., 'Preemstvennost' fabrichno - zavodskogo truda i formirovanie proletariata v Rossii', Rabochii klass i rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii 1861-1917, M. 1966, pp. 112-3; Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.17.

derived most of its income from the migrant's off-farm earnings, the migrant might still feel that his plot of land was of prime importance and do his utmost to maintain it. Many migrants, however, soon found that it was impossible to work in industry and to farm land in the countryside. Many retained ownership of a plot of land in their native villages but made little effort to cultivate it. Some would sell their land or rent it in perpetuity if the opportunity arose. Yet even those who divested themselves of land often had parents, ageing relatives or children to whom they were obliged to send money; or they might simply feel a strong spiritual bond to their native village, never quite adjusting to the alien urban environment. Many 'cadre' workers would have such familial or spiritual ties to the countryside. For purposes of analytical clarity, ~~therefore~~, it is best to try to confine the term "peasant worker" to those who had strong economic ties to agriculture, i.e. to those who owned and farmed land in the countryside.

There are no statistics on the number of peasant workers in St. Petersburg, but we can gain some sense of their proportion in the workforce by examining the patchy data on workers' ownership of land. A survey of cotton-workers in Petersburg in 1900-02 showed that 65% of those classified as "peasants" owned land in the countryside but only 5% left industry during the summer months to farm it. At the Baltic shipyard in December 1901 54% of "peasants" owned land in the countryside.⁷⁹ One of the most ambitious attempts to analyse land-

79. Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.30.

holding of workers in Petersburg was undertaken by the economist S.N. Prokopovich in 1908. His survey of 570 mainly skilled workers disclosed that 12% of married workers and 32% of single workers took part in farming land; a further 21% of married workers and 18% of single workers owned but did not farm land. A larger number, however, sent money to relatives in the countryside, viz. 42% of married workers and 67% of single workers.⁸⁰

Sending money to relatives was not in itself evidence of close bonds to the countryside. Many young workers who went to the towns in search of work had no choice. One youth explained that he sent money regularly to his family "so that my father will not summon me back to the countryside". Another explained that when he did not send enough money to his parents they used to write to him saying, "Watch out, or we'll confiscate your passport".⁸¹ A survey in 1912 of Petersburg textileworkers revealed that single women sent 6.5% of their earnings to kinsfolk in the countryside; single men sent 8% but married workers whose families lived in the village sent 28% of their earnings.⁸²

It is difficult to generalise from such exiguous data about the proportion of peasant workers in the labour force prior to the war, but it is clear that only a minority of Petersburg workers - less perhaps than a third - had real economic ties to the land. A much larger

80. Prokopovich, S.N., op. cit., p.7.

81. Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.30, Anyone born in the countryside was registered for passport and taxation purposes in his native village. A passport could only be issued to a peasant if the head of the household agreed. All taxes for which a peasant was liable were recorded in his passport. If he was in debt, permission to migrate was required from the mir. If he failed to pay his taxes a passport could be revoked. Once a peasant ceased to hold land in the village his obligation to pay taxes lapsed.

82. Davidovich, M., Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii v ego byudzhetakh, Pbg. 1912, p.8.

proportion had rural origins and rural connections but they were not "peasant workers" in the sense defined above.

Was the proportion of peasant workers in the labour force of the capital expanding or declining through time? Disregarding the somewhat aberrant period from 1914 to 1917 the evidence strongly suggests that land ownership was on the wane. The fullest source on this question is the 1929 survey of textileworkers and metalworkers in Leningrad. This showed clearly that the more recently a worker had entered industry, the less likely was he to own land (see Table 3):

Table 3

Relationship between land ownership and year of entry into industry

<u>Workers who entered industry:</u>	<u>% of workers who owned land</u>	
	<u>Leningrad textileworkers</u>	<u>Leningrad metalworkers</u>
before 1905	8.0%	17.5%
1906 - 13	4.6%	14.6%
1914 - 17	3.6%	12.3%

Source: Rashin, A.G., Sostav Fabrichno-Zavodskogo proletariata, M. 1930, p.23.

The declining proportion of workers who owned land through time is further illustrated by collating data from the censuses of 1918, 1926 and 1929 - all of which covered workers in Petrograd.

Exactly what proportion of workers in 1917 owned land is difficult to estimate. The 1918 industrial census is the source closest to that year but it covers only 107,262 workers in Petrograd - less than a third of the 1917 workforce. This was because by the time the census

Table 4

Proportion of workers who owned and farmed land in Leningrad

	<u>% of total who owned land</u>	<u>% of total who farmed land</u>	<u>% with no land</u>
1918	16.7% (17.2) ¹	9.5% (10.8)	83.2% (82.8)
1926	11.8% ²	4.4%	88.2%
1929	9.8% ³	-	91.2%

Sources:

1. Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie, XXVI, II, pp. 118-119. My calculations. The figures in brackets are those in Drobizhev, V.Z., Sokolov, A.K. and Ustinov, V.A., Rabochii klass Sovetskoi Rossii v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury, M. 1975, p.97.
2. Krasil'nikov, S., 'Svyaz' Leningradskogo rabocheho s zemlyei', Statisticheskoe Obozrenie, 4, April 1929, pp. 107-108. This is my recalculation of the figures for single and married workers.
3. Rashin, A.G., op. cit., p.25. This is my recalculation of the figures for the proportion of textileworkers and metalworkers with land (4.4% and 12.4% respectively).

was taken, factory closures, together with the promise of land in the countryside, had led to a gigantic exodus of workers out of the capital. Consequently, the figures from the 1918 census should be treated with caution, since it is reasonable to assume that those workers who did have land in the countryside in 1917 would have gone back to it before the census was taken. Those workers surveyed by the census were asked not only whether they still owned land, but also whether or not they had owned land prior to the October Revolution. 16.5% of the working class said that they had held land prior to October 1917, and 7.9% had actually farmed it.⁸³

83. Ts. S.U., Trudy, vol. XXVI, issue II, pp. 118-9.

This was considerably lower than the average for Russia as a whole (31% of workers owned land) but was almost certainly an accurate reflection of the greater degree of proletarianisation of the workforce of Petrograd. Notwithstanding the fact that the census almost certainly underestimates the proportion of workers owning land, it is unlikely to be wildly misleading if one considers that the censuses of 1926 and 1929 - both undertaken when the workforce of Leningrad was more stable - give even smaller figures for the proportion of landholding workers, thus testifying to the continued decline after 1917 of the proportion of peasant workers. The 1926 census divides workers into married and single categories and it is thus interesting to compare its findings with those of Prokopovich's survey of eighteen years previously. The comparison brings out dramatically the very rapid dissolution of the nexus with the land:

Table 5
% of workers who owned land

	% single workers who:		% married workers who:	
	owned land	farmed land	owned land	farmed land
1908 ¹	50%	32%	33%	12%
1918 ²	12.5%	7.3%	13.7%	6.6%
1926 ³	21.3%	6.6%	8.8%	3.7%

Sources:

1. Prokopovich, S.N., Byudzhety Peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg. 1908, p.7.
2. Drobizhev, V.Z., Sokolov, A.K. and Ustinov, V.A., op. cit., p.95.
3. Krasil'nikov, S., op. cit., p.97.

The censuses of 1918, 1926 and 1929 give some information on the proportion of land-owners in each branch of industry which again suggests that there was a constant decline in the proportion of workers owning land in the two major branches of industry in Petrograd:

<u>Table 6</u>		
<u>% of total workforce who owned land</u>		
	<u>metalworkers</u>	<u>textileworkers</u>
1918 ¹	18.7%	18.6%
1926 ²	10.2%	11.6%
1929 ³	12.4%	4.4%

Sources:

- 1. Drobizhev, V.Z., Sokolov, A.K. and Ustinov, V.A., op. cit., p.98.
- 2. Krasil'nikov, S., op. cit., p.108.
- 3. Rashin, A.G., op. cit., p.30.

These figures proved embarrassing to the Stalin government since they disclosed that there were more land-owners among metalworkers -regarded as the vanguard of the proletariat - than among textileworkers. A second and even more interesting finding emerged from this same census. Figures showed that the proportion of landowners was highest among groups with the longest service in industry:

<u>Table 7</u>		
<u>% of workers owning land who began work:</u>		
	<u>Leningrad textileworkers</u>	<u>Leningrad metalworkers</u>
prior to 1905	8.0%	17.5%
between 1905 and 1913	4.6%	14.6%
between 1914 and 1917	3.6%	12.3%

Source: Rashin, A.G., op. cit., p.30.

It is clear from this table that while the proportion of workers who owned land declined through time in both industries - a sure sign of increasing proletarianisation, long service in industry did not necessarily erode the tie with the countryside. Yet workers who had served in industry for twenty-five years or more were obviously proletarian regardless of whether or not they owned land. This suggests that by itself land ownership is not an adequate index of proletarianisation. This inference is supported by a further finding from the 1929 census which showed that a quarter of workers who owned land had actually been born into working-class rather than peasant families.⁸⁴ Thus if we are to assess the extent to which a process of proletarianisation was underway we must turn to data other than those on landownership.

Two sources can shed further light on this problem: the first consists of data on the numbers of hereditary workers, i.e. workers of whom one or both parents were themselves workers; the second consists of data on length of service in industry. The 1900-02 survey of Petersburg cotton workers revealed that 16% (21% of women workers) had at least one parent who was a worker.⁸⁵ By 1918 24.8% of textile-workers in Petrograd were hereditary proletarians (the highest proportion of any industrial group) compared to 20% of metalworkers.⁸⁶ The 1929 census correlated the social origin of Leningrad metalworkers

84. Rashin, A.G., Sostav, pp. 25, 35.

85. Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.23.

86. Drobizhev, V.Z., Sokolov, A.K. and Ustinov, V.A., Rabochii klass Sovetskoi Rossii v pervyi god proletarskoi diktatury, M. 1975, p.9.

and textileworkers with the year of their entry into industry. The results were as follows:

Table 8

<u>Year of entry into industry</u>	Proportion of total sample who entered industry in the period:-		Born into working class families (%)		Born into peasant families (%)	
	textile workers	metal workers	textile workers	metal workers	textile workers	metal workers
before 1905	22%	22%	44.5	43.1	52.7	52.0
between 1906 and 1913	18%	17.9%	53.8	52.2	42.2	42.0
between 1914 and 1917	10.4%	11.8%	56.2	56.9	39.6	37.3

Source: Rashin, A.G., op. cit., pp. 19 and 21.

Whilst these data are scanty they point clearly to an increase over time in the proportion of workers in Petrograd born into working-class families and a corresponding decline in the proportion born into peasant families.⁸⁷

The data on length of service in industry is even sparser and more difficult to interpret. Soviet historians usually assert that it took about five years for a worker new to industry to become a fully-fledged proletarian. Discussing this question in 1922, however,

87. One should not interpret these figures, as does L.M. Ivanov (op. cit.), to mean that by 1914 the working class itself had become the main source of recruits to industry, rather than the peasantry. For it is likely that many peasants who came to industry in the pre-1917 period left during the upheavals of the Civil War and were no longer working in industry by the time of the 1929 census.

Lenin argued: "We must ... define the term worker in such a way as to include only those who have acquired a proleterian mentality from their very conditions of life. But this is impossible unless the persons concerned have worked in a factory for many years." He proposed that only workers who had worked for ten or more years in industry should undergo the minimum probationary period for party membership of six months.⁸⁸ It is, of course, impossible to estimate with scientific precision the length of time which it took a peasant to become socialised into factory life. It may have taken as long as ten years for a peasant to overcome his rustic habits of work, the instinctive rhythm of hard and slack work, the dislike of close routine and his longing for the freedom of the outdoors.⁸⁹ For a young worker, however, it certainly would have taken far less time. One must therefore be cautious in interpreting the data.

In 1900-02 about two-thirds of cotton workers had worked in industry for under five years. Four years later a survey of the Baltic ship works showed about the same proportion of new workers.⁹⁰ However there was some variation between factories. At the Triangle works no less than 46% of the workforce had worked for ten or more years at the factory, compared to 25% at Putilov. L.M. Ivanov cites a figure of 48% of women workers in Petersburg with industrial experience of ten or more years.⁹¹ In 1908 a survey of metalworkers showed

88. Lenin, V.I., Collected Works, vol. 33, pp. 254, 256.

89. Thompson, E.P., 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', Past and Present, vol. 38, 1967.

90. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.502.

91. Ivanov, L.M., op. cit., p.81.

that 28% had worked less than two years in industry; 34% between two and five years and 39% five or more years. In the large factories with a workforce of more than a thousand, however, the proportion of workers with five or more years of service rose to 53%.⁹² These figures suggest that a majority of workers were new to industry, yet this need not mean that the labour force was obviously "peasant" in character. We know that it took very little time for some peasants to submit to the cultural pressures of town life and factory work. As early as the 1880's contemporaries had noted the speed with which peasants underwent a change of cultural identity as a result of migration. A health inspector observed of the districts from which there was migration to the capital that "clothes are much cleaner, smarter and more hygienic. The children are kept cleaner and ... skin diseases are not so frequent." In the villages of Simbirsk, from which there was migration, a contemporary noted that "houses, clothes, habits and amusements remind one more of town life than of the village." In Yaroslavl' province "public opinion dubs a bumpkin to the end of his days anyone who has not lived in Petersburg or elsewhere but has engaged in agriculture or some handicraft; such a man finds it hard to get a wife."⁹³ In view of this, Soviet historians may well be right to allow only five years as the average period it would take a worker to become acculturated to industrial and urban life, but since the problem is very under-researched, I do not draw any firm conclusions from the data on length of service in industry.

92. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.504.

93. The quotations are all cited by Lenin, V.I., The Development of Capitalis m in Russia, Collected Works, vol. 3, pp. 576-578.

The above review of the evidence on land ownership and ties with the land in general, on second-generation workers and on length of service in industry clearly reveals the process of proletarianisation that was taking place among Petersburg workers in the period from the turn of the century. The proportion of "cadre" workers in the workforce was thus increasing, reflected in the decay of ties with the land and the growing number of hereditary workers. However it is far more difficult to estimate the ratio of cadre workers to new workers on the eve of the war. Above, it was suggested that less than a third of the workforce had economic links with the countryside by 1914, but in addition to these workers, there were workers new to industry who were not yet fully proletarianised. In the five years prior to 1914 the factory workforce of Petersburg grew by 53% from 158,152 to 242,600. Thus in 1914 about a third of the total workforce had entered industry within the previous five years.⁹⁴ Allowing for the fact that this third of the workforce must have overlapped to a significant degree with the third of the workforce whom I designated as authentic peasant workers one can crudely estimate the proportion of not fully proletarianised workers at 40% to 50% in 1914. This more or less tallies with the prudent calculations of the Soviet historian E.E. Kruze, who reckoned the proportion of 'cadre' workers in 1914 to be around 60%.⁹⁵ Petersburg was probably unusual by Russian standards in having a majority of 'cadre' workers within its labour force at this time.

94. Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, p.75.

95. ibid., pp. 76-7.

The war led to a decline in the proportion of 'cadre' workers in the industrial workforce of the capital. This was caused partly by conscription and partly by the massive influx of new workers into the factories. Throughout Russian industry as a whole about 400,000 to 500,000 - or 20% to 25% of the whole workforce of 1914 - were conscripted into the army.⁹⁶ In Petrograd, however, the proportion was much less, since workers there were needed to produce for the war effort. Leiberov and Shkaratan estimate that about 40,000 industrial workers in Petrograd were conscripted - or 17% of the 1914 workforce.⁹⁷ Those conscripted, according to the same authors, were mainly young workers without a great deal of experience of industry. Fully-proletarianised 'cadre' workers usually had some skill and were little affected, since their skills were in short supply. In later mobilisations, however, known militants and strike leaders were drafted into the army as punishment for participation in industrial and political protest. Leiberov and Shkaratan estimate that as many as 6,000 workers may have been conscripted on these grounds.⁹⁸ They conclude nevertheless that the 'cadre' proletariat was preserved during the war.

The proportion of 'cadres' within the workforce was reduced not so much by conscription as by the influx of new workers caused by the wartime expansion of production. Between 1914 and 1917 the workforce in Petrograd grew by 150,000, and making allowance for the 40,000 who were conscripted, at the very least 190,000 workers must

96. Volobuev, P.V., op. cit., p.20.

97. Leiberov, I.P. and Shkaratan, O.I., 'K voprosu o sostave petrogradskikh promyshlennykh rabochikh v 1917g', Voprosy Istorii, 1961, no. 1, p.52.

have entered industry. These comprised four major groups: peasants; women and youths; urban petit-bourgeois and evacuees. We know that 77,100 women and youths entered industry during the war,⁹⁹ which means that 113,000 were adult males. If one estimates the number of evacuees and urban petit-bourgeois who entered industry at 20,000 each, then over 70,000 men entered industry who must have come overwhelmingly from the countryside. When one takes into account that a large number of women and youths also came from the countryside, then the peasantry clearly provided the chief source of wartime recruits to industry.¹⁰⁰

Peasants flooded into the factories of Petrograd, not just because of rural poverty, but also because of a desire to avoid military service. Quite how they came to evade conscription is unclear, though some were probably too old.¹⁰¹

Unfortunately, there are no figures on the size, composition and distribution of this infusion of peasants. We know that at the Obukhov works nearly 5,000 peasants were hired during the war; at the Sestroretsk arms factory 1,875 male peasants were taken on.¹⁰² Data from Moscow suggest that there was an increase in the numbers of middling and wealthy peasants who sought work in industry, for in 1915, 80% of those looking for work through the Moscow Labour Exchange

99. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.36.

100. These are my own rough calculations designed to disprove the claim of Ivanov, L.M., op. cit., p.76 and Rashin, A.G., Sostav, p.30, that more wartime recruits came from the working class than from the peasantry.

101. Volobuev, P.V., op. cit., p.24.

102. Leiberov, I.P. and Shkaratan, O.I., op. cit., p.44.

had land in the countryside.¹⁰³ Some of these 'peasant' recruits may actually have been rural kustari (artisans) with experience of artisanal craft production.

The second major source of recruits were women and youths. By 1917 there were 68,200 more women and 8,900 more youths working in the factories of Petrograd than there had been in 1914.¹⁰⁴ One should not assume that all these women came from the countryside; many must have come from working-class families where the male breadwinner - brother, husband or father - was fighting at the Front and thus no longer able to support the family.

The third source of recruits consisted of urban petit-bourgeois. When the war broke out many small traders, shopkeepers, landlords, porters, domestic servants, artists and others took jobs in munitions factories in order to escape conscription. A check on reservists at the Putilov works in August 1917 led to the "voluntary" departure of 2,000 workers described as "book-keepers, shop-owners, tailors, artists, jewellers, corn-chandlers, coopers, landlords and cafe-owners."¹⁰⁵ Leiberov and Shkaratan estimate that such elements comprised 5% to 7% of the factory workforce in Petrograd.¹⁰⁶

A final source of recruits was provided by workers evacuated from the Baltic provinces and Western parts of Russia. Some 20 factories were evacuated from Riga, with a workforce of over 6,000, and about 25 factories from Lithuania.¹⁰⁷ In addition, there were many Polish workers - some 5,000 at Putilov in 1917. Relatively few Chinese

103. Volobuev, P.V., op. cit., p.24.

104. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.36

105. Krasnaya Letopis', 1932, no. 3, p.169.

106. Leiberov, I.P. and Shkaratan, O.I., op. cit., p.47.

107. Rabochii Klass i rabochee duizhenie v 1917g, p.82.

Korean, Central Asian or Persian workers came to Petrograd, although scores of thousands were drafted into the mines of the Donbass, Urals and Siberia, but there were several hundred in the state enterprises of the capital.¹⁰⁸ If the 1918 industrial census is reliable for 1917, then 15.8% of the factory labour force in Petrograd were non-Russians in 1917, though by no means all of these had come during the war. The largest group were Poles (who comprised 5.8% of the total labour force), followed by Latvians and Lithuanians (2.6%), Finns (2.3%), Germans (0.5%), Jews (0.3%) and so on.¹⁰⁹

Leiberov and Shkaratan conclude that if one subtracts the 190,000 workers who came into industry during the war from the total factory workforce in 1917 (392,800), one is left with the number of 'cadre' workers - between 200,000 and 220,000, allowing for the fact that most evacuees were probably 'cadre'. This leads them to conclude that a majority of the factory workforce in Petrograd in 1917 - 50% to 60% - were 'cadres'. But this assumes that by 1917 all those workers who had been working in industry in 1914 were 'cadres'. This seems an unwarranted assumption, in view of the fact that at least 40% of the workforce in 1914 had either less than five years' experience in industry or were peasant workers. Making some allowance for this, therefore, it is likely that by 1917 'cadres' no longer comprised a majority of the workforce of Petrograd as they had done in 1914 but

108. Gilbert, M.I., 'K voprosu o sostave promyshlennykh rabochikh SSSR v gody grazhdanskoi voiny', Istoriya proletariata SSSR, 1934, no. 3 (19), pp. 214-5; Payal'in, N.P., Zavod imeni Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L. 1933, p.313.

109. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.42.

constituted between 40% and 50% of the factory labour force.¹¹⁰

ii) Women Workers and Young Workers

Petrograd was unusual in that the largest portion of its women workers were employed in factories. By January 1917 129,800 women worked in the factories of the capital.¹¹¹ This compared to 83,000 domestic servants, mostly women, who worked in dire conditions for shockingly low wages;¹¹² perhaps 50,000 women who worked in offices and similar establishments and perhaps a similar number who worked in shops and in the wholesale and retail trade.¹¹³ Other women worked in the clothing trade and in various kinds of workshops and sweat shops. The opportunities for women to do factory work in Petrograd had come about largely as a consequence of the war. The proportion of women in the factory labour force rose from 25.7% in 1913 to 33.3% in 1917.¹¹⁴ This was, however, a smaller increase than the national average; during the war the proportion of women in Russian industry as a whole soared from 26.6% to 43.2%.¹¹⁵

110. Stepanov (ibid. pp. 43-4) concludes that 'the figure of 50% for new recruits to the working class of Petrograd during the war years can scarcely be considered an underestimate' and L.M. Kleinbort, Istoriya bezrabortitsy v Rossii, 1857-1919gg, M. 1925, p.272, says, without citing a source, that at the beginning of 1918 Narkomtrud reckoned that half the workers of Petrograd were either tied to the land or inexperienced wartime recruits.

111. Karpetskaya, N.D., Rabotnitsy i Velikii Oktyabr', L. 1974, p.19.

112. Golos Rabotnitsy, no. 5-6, 17 June 1917, p.14. A perusal of the job vacancies column of Petrogradskaya Gazeta in 1917 shows that the rural girl with no male acquaintances and prepared to work hard was the type most sought after as a domestic servant.

113. Strumilin, S.G., 'Sostav proletariata Sovetskoi Rossii v 1917-19gg', Dva goda diktatury proletariata, M. 1919, p.15.

114. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.34.

115. Shlyapnikov, A., Semadtsatyi God, vol. I, M.L. 1923, pp. 8-11.

The textile industry was the factory industry in which women constituted the highest proportion of the workforce. As early as 1900 women comprised 56% of the textile labour force in Petersburg; by 1913 the proportion had risen to 68%.¹¹⁶ After 1905 the mill-owners had begun to introduce women into the mills in earnest. In 1906 the annual factory inspectors' report noted that:

Factory owners are everywhere replacing men with women, not only among adult workers but among youths, because they consider that women are more peaceful and steady; moreover ... female labour is cheaper than male.

A year later the factory inspectors again noted:

The increase in the application of female labour is particularly sharply reflected in the cotton-weaving industry, where women weavers have ousted men. The reasons for this are as before: greater industry, attentiveness and abstinence (they do not drink or smoke), their compliance and greater reasonableness in respect of pay.¹¹⁷

The war further increased the percentage of women in the Petrograd textile industry so that by 1917 69% of the workforce were adult women and a further 10% were teenage girls.¹¹⁸

The textile workforce was composed mainly of young single women. A survey of 7,000 textileworkers in Petrograd in 1918 revealed that 18% were aged 17 or under; 17% aged 18 to 20; 28% aged 21 to 30; 18% aged 31 to 40 and 19% aged 41 and over. 69% of women were under the

116. Semanov, S.N., op. cit., p.44; Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, pp. 78-9.

117. Cited in Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, pp. 235-6.

118. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.34.

age of 30 compared to 39% of men, most of the latter being boys under 17.¹¹⁹ Amongst the male textileworkers (who comprised only 13% of the total) 70% were married, 2% widowed and 28% single. Amongst the women, however, only 33% were married, 11% widowed and 56% single. This reflected the large share of young girls in the industry and also the fact that the marriage rate had gone down as a consequence of the war. This was particularly striking among women textileworkers aged 20 to 30. In 1909 74% of this group had been married, but nine years later only 49%.¹²⁰

The older men in the textile industry occupied almost all the most skilled jobs: they spun the finest yarns and wove the more complex patterns. They were the overlookers and mechanics. Young boys worked as bobbin-tenders, heddlers or twisters, as did many young girls. The majority of women were concentrated in the semi-skilled and unskilled jobs, as jenny-tenders, fly-frame tenders, twisters, doffers or machine-loom operators.

By 1917 more women in Petrograd worked in the metal industries than in textiles (approximately 48,000 as against 30,000), but they comprised a minority of the workforce, albeit one which had rocketed from 2.7% in 1913 to 20.3% in 1917.¹²¹ These women worked in mass production factories producing cartridges, shells, shrapnel etc. Some 18,000 women worked in the 'chemicals' industry, of whom over 10,000 were employed at a single plant - the giant Triangle rubber works, which produced everything from galoshes to gas masks. A further

119. Vestnik Professional'nykh Soyuzov, no. 2, 15 July 1918, p.7.

120. ibid., p.9.

121. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.34.

10,000 women were employed in the food and tobacco industries where they comprised a majority of the workforce. Finally about 5,000 worked in the leather industry, including 3,000 at the Skorokhod shoe factory which made boots for soldiers. All these jobs had one thing in common, they were unskilled and badly-paid. This reflected the way in which the sexual division of labour within the patriarchal peasant household, still the major unit of production at this time, had been transposed into the factory.

The position of the women worker was crucially influenced by her role within the family. All married women and many young single women were obliged to perform unpaid domestic labour within the family, thus making them economically dependent upon the incoming wages of the male bread-winner. Even when women worked outside the home, wage work was considered secondary to their role as wives, mothers and housekeepers. It is thus necessary to look briefly at the role of the women within the working-class family in order to understand the position of the woman worker in full.

It is difficult to distinguish a 'working-class' family from the dominant peasant model. Among male workers, peasant workers were more likely than proletarianised workers to be married, for they could leave their wives and children to subsist on the family plot of land in the countryside, whereas only proletarianised workers who earned good wages could afford to support a family in the town.¹²² A survey of metalworkers in 1908 showed that 46% of those earning less than 1r.50k a day were single, compared to 21% of those earning more than 2r.50k. a day.¹²³ Since earnings of young workers tended

122. Bernshtein-Kogan, S., Chislennost', sostav i polozhenie peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg., 1910, pp. 51, 54.

123. Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, p.86.

to be low, most workers were forced to wait until their late twenties before getting married. By 1918 60% of industrial workers in Russia were married or widowed, compared to 63% of male metalworkers and 46% of female in Petrograd in the same year.¹²⁴ 71% of all married workers lived with their families - an important indication of the extent to which workers had broken their ties with the countryside. In 1897 only 30% of married metalworkers had lived with their families; in 1918 three-quarters of skilled fitters in Petrograd did so.¹²⁵ The size of working-class families in the towns tended to be smaller than the peasant family. In 1897 the average Russian family consisted of 4.53 persons but in Petrograd in 1918 married^{male}/workers on average had 2.4 dependents, though skilled fitters had 3.7.¹²⁶

Among women workers the evidence cited above suggested that perhaps a slight majority were young single women. Many of these would have come from the countryside, and factory work could have brought them a measure of economic independence.¹²⁷ The majority of married women workers were from working-class families and they faced dual responsibilities as housewives as well as workers. One Soviet anthropologist has suggested that women had a higher status in the working-class family than in the peasant family and that there was a more equal division of labour within the former than within the latter. She cites as evidence the opinion of M. Davidovich, surveyor of St. Petersburg textileworkers, who wrote in 1909:

124. Metallist, no. 6, 18 June 1918, p.10; Ts. S.U., Trudy, XXVI, issue II, pp. 110-11.

125. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, Izbrannye Proizvedeniya, vol. 3, M. 1964, pp. 69-71.

126. ibid. and Bernshtein-Kogan, S., op. cit., p.54.

127. Compare Dublin, T., 'Women, Work and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills', Labor History, vol. 16, no. 1, Winter 1975.

While the women hurries straight home from the factory to the children, the husband goes off to market and to the shops to buy provisions for supper and next day's dinner...in his spare time the husband must always look after the children.¹²⁸

Yet there is a good deal of other evidence to suggest that domestic labour remained as much the responsibility of the woman in the 'proletarian' family, as it was in its peasant counterpart. A. Il'ina, writing in the journal of the textileworkers, Tkach, gives this agonising description of the lot of the working mother:

Having finished work at the factory, the woman worker is still not free. While the male worker goes off to a meeting, or just takes a walk or plays billiards with his mates, she has to cope with the housework - to cook, to wash and so on... she is seldom helped by her husband. Unfortunately, one has to admit that male workers are still very prejudiced. They think that it is humiliating for a man to do 'woman's' work (bab'yu rabotu). They would sooner their sick, worn-out wife did the household chores (barshchinu) by herself. They would rather tolerate her remaining completely without leisure - illiterate and ignorant - than condescend to help her do the housework. And on top of all these yokes and burdens, the woman worker has still the heavy load of motherhood... Today, for a working class woman, having a baby is no joy - it's a burden, which at times gets quite unbearable.¹²⁹

That the latter quotation typifies the lot of the working woman more closely than the former, is suggested by data on the burden of domestic labour. In 1922 a survey of 76 urban families was conducted, which revealed the staggering amount of time spent in domestic labour. Strumilin calculated that if this labour were socialised, 7,235,000 people, working an eight-hour day, would be required to service the

128. Krupyanskaya, V. Yu., 'Evolyutsiya semeino-bytovogo uklada rabochikh', Rossiiskii proletariat - oblik, bor'ba, gegomoniya, M. 1970, p.277.

129. Tkach, 1917, no. 2, p.7.

needs of 20 million people. In the towns this would mean 360 eight-hour man-days of domestic labour for every thousand of the population per day - and even more in the countryside. At 1913 prices this would cost the state no less than 1,302 million rubles per year.¹³⁰ Even if women were given some help from men in doing this vast job gratis, it cannot have done much to attenuate their general condition of domestic slavery.

Prior to the war the prevalence of large-scale industry in Petersburg probably meant that the employment of children was less widespread in the capital than in Russian industry generally. On the eve of the war about 8% of the workforce under the Factory Inspectorate in Petersburg consisted of youths aged 15 to 17. In addition, about 2,000 children aged 12 to 15 were employed in porcelain and glass factories, print shops and other small enterprises.¹³¹ In the course of the war the number of young workers in Petrograd grew, but less than the national average. The number of under-17's rose from 22,900 to 31,800, but their proportion within the factory labour force remained about the same.¹³² The proportion of young workers was highest in the textiles (12.7%), food (11.8%), leather (10.7%), metal (6.6%) and chemical industries (6.5%). Young workers were most numerous in the metal industries and it was this industry which constituted the base of the youth movement in Petrograd in 1917.

130. Strumilin, S.G., 'Byudzhët vremeni russkogo rabochego', Voprosy Truda, 1923, no. 3-4.

131. Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, p.80.

132. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.36.

The Russian labour force was remarkable for the very low proportion of middle-aged workers, and almost complete absence of elderly workers, within its ranks. In 1900 in Petersburg 23% of the factory workforce were aged 16 to 20; 52% were aged 21 to 40 and only 12% were older than 40.¹³³ The First World War significantly changed this age balance. Conscription meant that the percentage of Petrograd workers aged 21 to 40 shrank from 52% to 47% (nationally this shrinkage was far more dramatic). These workers were replaced by workers over 40, whose share of the workforce shot up from 12% to 31%.¹³⁴ Even in 1917, however, the Petrograd working class was marked by its significant youthfulness compared to the longer-established working classes of Western Europe.

iii) Skilled Workers and Unskilled Workers

Although the major social division within the Russian working class in 1917 was between 'cadres' and workers-in-Formation (peasant workers and new workers), this division was beginning to lose its salience, as the working class itself grew in importance, relative to the peasantry, as a source of recruits for industry. As this happened, skill tended to become the major basis of structural differentiation within the working class.

The definition of 'skill' is a thorny problem. Skill refers to the quality of work: a skilled job demands greater precision, dexterity and mental exertion than an unskilled job. Skill differences are

133. Kruze, E.E., Peterburgskie, p.80.

134. Gaponenko, L.S., op. cit., p.72; Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.38.

rooted in the labour process - in the physical and intellectual requirements of particular operations within a specific labour process. Some writers have argued that it is possible to measure skill by comparing the length of training necessary for different jobs.¹³⁵ The problem is, however, that while skills do have real existence in the requirements of a job and in the capabilities of the worker, they are also partially determined by class struggle. Workers' organisations can 'artificially' create skills, by restricting access to particular jobs; they can control the institutions and practices whereby skills are acquired, transmitted and recognised.¹³⁶ Because skill determination is a site of class struggle the usefulness of criteria such as length of apprenticeship or relative wage levels as 'objective' measures of skill must be fairly limited.

In the long term the general tendency of development of the capitalist mode of production has been towards the destruction of all-round skills. As early as the manufacturing phase of capitalism the organisation of labour was transformed so that the traditional work of the craftsman, involving the production of a commodity from its inception to its completion, was sub-divided into its constituent tasks and performed in series by detail workers. With the rise of mechanised factory production the general tendency was towards changing the instruments of production. The tools of labour were removed

135. Freysinnet, M., Le processus de déqualification - surqualification de la force de travail, Paris, 1974, pp. 121-2.

136. Gorz, A., 'Technology, technicians and class struggle', in Gorz, A. ed., The division of labour, Brighton: Harvester, 1976; Lee, D., 'Skill, craft and class: a theoretical critique and a critical case', Sociology, Feb. 1981 (forthcoming); H.A. Turner in his classic study went so far as to argue that workers are skilled or unskilled "according to whether or not entry to their occupations is deliberately restricted and not, in the first place, according to the nature of the occupation itself." Turner, H.A., Trade Union Structure and Growth, London: George, Allen & Unwin, 1962, p.182.

from the craftsman's hand and placed in the grip of a mechanism: power was transmitted to the tool which then acted upon the materials to achieve the desired result. In the past fifty years the 'scientific and technical revolution' has mechanised and automated all aspects of the labour process - from labour power to the instruments and materials of labour. The drive for ever-greater productivity has thus tended towards the incorporation by management (not without resistance) of more efficient methods and machinery into the labour process, so as to transform it from a process conducted by the worker into a process conducted by management.¹³⁷ The major industry of Petrograd, the metalworking industry, was still dependent on the skilled craftsmen at the beginning of this century. Engineering firms were relatively unspecialised, making a large range of products and thus the all-round skills of craftsmen played a crucial role. At the same time, however, the metalworking and metallurgical industries of the capital, from the 1890's onwards, were machine-based and fairly advanced in technology. Thus, although heavily dependent on skilled craftsmen, they nevertheless were quite different from, for example, the British engineering industry of the mid-19th century, which relied predominantly on manual labour. In his study of the Renault works the sociologist Alain Touraine distinguished three phases in the organisation of work. The first was the old system which relied on craftsmanship and required only universal mechanics, such as lathes, not limited to the production of a single product. The second phase saw the break-up of a job into its component parts,

137. Braverman, H., Labor and Monopoly Capital, New York Monthly Review Press, 1974, p.169.

the development of mechanisation and the feeding of machines by unskilled workers. The third phase is the phase of automation, where direct productive work by human beings is eliminated.¹³⁸ In the decade or so before 1917, the Petrograd metalworking industries were in a process of transition from the first to the second of Touraine's phases. The boom of 1909-13 saw the introduction of assembly lines, standardised calibres and inter-changeable parts. The First World War gave a huge boost to this process.

The skilled metalworkers of Petrograd, who were to play such a central role in the events of 1917, were far removed from the labour aristocrats one associates with the 'model' unions of mid-19th century Britain. Yet they were also far removed from the 'mass production' workers of the Taylorised or Fordist enterprise.¹³⁹ As men whose manual and intellectual skills were respected, who exercised some degree of control over their jobs and who were used to taking decisions in their work, the skilled metalworkers of Petrograd were not unlike their counterparts at Armstrong-Whitworth, the Schwarzkopf works in Berlin or at Fiat-Centro in Turin. In other respects, however, they were rather different. The traditions of the Russian metalworkers were those of the peasant rather than of the artisan, though a significant number were from Kustar' families.¹⁴⁰ They worked in an industry which had not grown organically out of small workshop productions, but which had had an advanced division of labour from its birth. In contrast to their British counterparts,

138. Touraine, A., L'évolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault, Paris, 1955.

139. Bologna, S., 'Class composition and theory of the party at the origin of the workers councils movement', Labour Process and Class Strategies, CSE pamphlet no. 1, 1976.

140. Shkaratan, O.I., Problemy sotsial'noi struktury rabocheho klassa, M. 1970, p.197.

skilled engineers in Russia did not serve a formal five- or seven-year apprenticeship and were not organised into exclusive craft unions, capable of controlling entry to the trade, of imposing standard pay and conditions and of regulating workshop matters through "custom and practice".¹⁴¹

In 19th century Russia factory workers had been divided into two categories - masterovye and rabochie, literally, 'craftsmen' and 'workers'.¹⁴² The Rules of Hire for the Naval Ministry Ports explained the difference as follows:

Masterovye are those appointed to jobs and duties which require preliminary training and special knowledge. Rabochie are those appointed to jobs and duties which do not require preliminary training and special knowledge.¹⁴³

An irritatingly vague definition, but then the terms themselves were vaguely used. Masterovoi indicated a worker who was skilled, able and commanded respect. It was still in use in 1917 to denote a skilled craftsman, but had been gradually falling out of usage from about the turn of the century. Instead the word rabochii which had connoted inferior, unskilled workers, broadened in meaning to include all workers, skilled and unskilled. Unskilled factory workers were distinguished by the term chernorabochie (literally, 'black

141. Watson, W.F., Machines and Men, London: Allen & Unwin, 1935.

142. This word is not to be confused with the word master. Dal' defined a master as either "an artisan doing some trade, craft or handiwork, well-versed or skilful in his work", or as "the senior person in a workshop or part of a factory, who supervises the podmaster'ya (journeymen) and the workers". Dal', V., Tolkovyĭ Slovar' Zhivogo Velikorusskogo Yazyka, Pbg., 1903. It was in the latter sense - of 'foreman' - that the term was used in the factories of our period.

143. Cited in Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.34.



workers') which, until the 1900's had been used mainly of unskilled workers outside factories, usually of labourers in the construction and haulage industries, but by the turn of the century had come to include unskilled factory workers.¹⁴⁴

The masterovye of the metal industries included highly skilled workers such as instrument-makers, millwrights, pattern-makers, electricians, platers and engravers who performed complex precision work, working independently from technical drawings and using sophisticated measuring instruments. Beneath them were many skilled but less specialised workers who were fully trained, who could work from technical drawings but whose work was not especially complex. These included most kinds of fitters (slesari) and turners (tokari), electricians, mechanics, planers, mortise-makers, etc. These men (there were no women in these trades) were distinguished by their craft consciousness, as many worker-memoirists recall. A.M. Buiko, who worked at the Putilov works at the turn of the century, recalls:

In those days it was felt that if a worker did not master his trade, did not become a good craftsman, then he was not a proper fellow. This point of view had its roots in the days of kustarshchina, when old craftsmen regarded unskilled workers as a casual element in their midst. A worker who had not mastered his trade was scornfully called a "master at earning his bread" (masterovym po khlebu)... If a young man began a conversation with an older skilled fitter or turner he would be told: "Learn first how to hold a hammer and use a chisel and a knife, then you can begin to argue like a man who has something to teach others". For many years we had to put up with this. If you wanted to be an organiser, then you had to know your job. If you did, then they would say of you - "he's not a bad lad - he works well and he's got a smart brain when it comes to politics".¹⁴⁵

144. Dal', V., op. cit.; Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.24; Bernshtein-Kogan, S., op. cit., p.23.

145. Buiko, A.M., Put' rabochego: zapiski staroga bol'shevika, M. 1934, p.30.

A. Buzinov, who worked at the Nevskii works as a foundryman, remembers:

Every branch of production, and even each craft (tsekh), infects the worker with professional or craft patriotism. He sings the virtues of his own trade (remeslo) and spits on all the rest. Metalworkers felt themselves to be aristocrats among the rest of the working class. Their profession demanded more training and so they looked down on weavers and others, as though they were inferior bumpkins - today they are at the mill, tomorrow they go off to plough the land. Everyone recognised the superiority of metalworkers, with all the advantages that that implied... The oddness of the textileworkers hit me in the eyes. Many of them still wore peasant clothes. They looked as though they had wandered into the town by mistake and tomorrow would find their way back to their native villages. Women predominated among them and one never lost an opportunity to pour scorn on them. Alongside the textileworkers, the metalworkers appeared to be a race apart, accustomed to life in the capital and more independent... The more I grew into the factory family (zavodskuyu sem'yu), the more it became clear just how much variety there was even within one factory. Soon I began to feel that the workers in the engineering shop - fitters and turners - looked down on me. Later I realised that workers in the furnace shops - the foundry, the rolling-mill and the forge - had a low status. For the first time I saw that the people there were heavy and awkward in speech and gait. In each face, through the deep tan of the furnace, coarse features were clearly visible, which seemed to say that strength, not wit, was what was required in their work. I soon realised that next to the most experienced foundryman, even a poor fitter seemed an educated, thinking man. The fitter held his head higher and was sharper and quicker in tongue. He could tease you with a dozen words in the time it took the founder to say a simple yes or no. I was drawn automatically into talking about things in general with the fitter, rather than just about wages. In a nutshell, the worker from the engineering shop was not just part of the raw materials of the foundry or forge, he was a product of the precision tools and machines... And I did not wish to be worse than they.¹⁴⁶

146. Buzinov, A., Za Nevskoi Zastavoi, M.L. 1930, pp. 20-1.

The Bolshevik, M.I. Kalinin, recalled in 1940:

I remember how in the underground a dispute arose among us: was a worker-revolutionary obliged to work as well as he was able... Some said, we cannot, we are organically incapable of letting a bad piece of work out of our hands - it would sicken us and demean our dignity. Others argued against them that it was not for us to worry about the quality of our work. It was the job of the capitalist. We only worked for them.¹⁴⁷

In these three passages one sees the classic elements of craft ideology. The pride of craftsmen in the mastery of their trade; the esteem which they enjoyed because of their knowledge of processes and materials and their manual dexterity; their condescension towards labourers and unskilled workers; their disdain for the peasants and their boorish way-of-life; their scorn of callow youth; their measuring a person's moral integrity - and, indeed, their political credibility - in terms of their mastery of their trade; the mutual respect felt by craftsmen and employers, which did not necessarily preclude an awareness of exploitation on the part of the craftsmen; the oppressive attitudes towards women, etc. In the decade before 1917, however, this craft pride was to take a severe knock as the position of these skilled workers was undermined by technological change. It was not until the First World War that this became fully apparent.

The colossal demands placed on the Petrograd metal industries by the war gave a big boost to the transformation of work processes and work organisation. The whole-scale introduction of mass production

147. Cited by Shkaratan, O.I. and Vakzer, A.Z., 'Razvitie sotsialisticheskogo otnosheniya k trudu: rabochie Leningrada v 1917-24gg', Uchenye Zapiski Len. Gos. Ped. Inst. im. Gertsena, vol. 165, 1958, p.108.

techniques substantially changed the skill profile of the metal workforce, greatly expanding the ranks of semi-skilled workers. The influx of women and peasants into semi-skilled jobs as machine-operators posed a threat to the position of the skilled masterovye. Yu. Milonov, a leader of the metalworkers' union, described the process thus:

The technology of production during the war was characterised by the broad application of automatic machines. The whole of war production was done on them... This caused sharp changes in the professional make-up of workers in the metal-working industry. Alongside a reduction in the number of skilled, specialist masterovye, as a result of the numerous mobilisations, the number of rabochie operating machines increased. And so the metalworkers' unions which arose after the February Revolution differed in their occupational make-up from the unions of the pre-war period. No longer did masterovye predominate in them, but the unqualified rabochie.¹⁴⁸

Petrograd metalworkers were experiencing what in the British context was termed 'dilution' i.e. the introduction of semi-skilled workers into jobs formerly done by skilled male workers. James Hinton has shown that in the British engineering industry craftsmen whose status and privileges were still intact when war broke out - mainly those on the Clyde and in Sheffield - led a class-wide offensive against 'dilution'.¹⁴⁹ Chris Goodey has suggested that in Petrograd 'dilution' and de-skilling were almost as much at issue as on the

148. Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, sb. I, M. 1925, pp. 16-17.

149. Hinton, J., The First Shop Stewards' Movement, London: Allen & Unwin, 1973.

Clydeside'.¹⁵⁰ Yet what is surprising about the Russian experience is precisely the absence of any militant opposition from the masterovye. Gordienko, who worked as a moulder at the Lessner works, writes:

During the time of my short absence, big changes took place. The turning shop was filled with machines - mechanical assembly lines and vices - and new workers, including many women, youths and the sons of those who could afford to buy them out of the army. The mood of the cadre workers was indifferent.¹⁵¹

This indifference to 'dilution' was probably the product of several factors. Firstly, the extent of 'dilution' should not be exaggerated. Some rather doubtful calculations by S.G. Strumilin purport to show that the average skill level in the Petrograd metal industry fell by 17% during the war. Among fitters and turners it fell by 12%, although the quality of these workers deteriorated, as men without adequate training were promoted to skilled jobs in a way which would have been unthinkable prior to the war.¹⁵² Secondly, it is unlikely that skilled metalworkers were directly displaced by semi-skilled

150. Goodey, C., 'Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', Critique no. 3, Autumn 1974, p.31.

151. Gordienko, I., Iz boevogo proshlogo, 1914-18gg., M. 1957, p.34. My emphasis. To say that the mood of skilled workers was "indifferent" is not to say that there was not a certain latent hostility to the new wartime recruits. The syndicalist leader of the metalworkers' union, A. Gastev, wrote: "Even in Russia, where craft consciousness (tsekhovshchina) has not built as strong a nest for itself as in the West, in the factories, among both management and workers, there is a suspicion of all newcomers who are not connected with factory professions. Among turners and fitters one still finds a scornful attitude towards the "shoe-makers" and "bakers" who are joining the ranks of the factory chernorabochie in their hundreds". Gastev, A., 'Novaya Industriya', Vestnik Metallista, 1918, no. 2, p.10.

152. Strumilin, S.G., Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v russkoi promyshlennosti, 1913-22gg., M. 1923, p.15. His method was to examine wage levels in different industries

women; the latter probably went into new sectors of production, and the massive expansion of production generally may actually have increased opportunities for traditional craftsmen. This may connect with a third factor, which is that, although working conditions in the metal industry deteriorated during the war, real wages increased. This may further have inhibited opposition to 'dilution'.

In spite of wartime de-skilling, the proportion of skilled workers in the metal industry in 1917 was higher than in other industries. The only data on skill composition relate to 1918 not 1917 and must thus be treated with caution in view of the tremendous changes which had taken place in the previous year as a result of the demobilisation of industry. In August 1918 Strumilin undertook a survey of the metalworkers still working in the capital. Classifying the 21,792 workers in enterprises of more than 500 workers according to the skill categories used by the metalworkers' union, Strumilin discovered that 22.7% were highly skilled; 23.1% skilled; 21.1% semi-skilled and 29% unskilled.¹⁵³ Even after the war-time changes the most numerous occupational category in the industry remained that of 'fitter', a relatively unspecialised craftsman who could turn his hand to several jobs.

between June 1914 and June 1916 and to translate the wages of all categories of worker into ratios of the wages of an adult male chernorabochii (= 100). By determining the change in these ratios during the war, Strumilin obtained an indirect index of de-skilling. It seems to me, however, that there are problems with this method. Firstly, it assumes that the "skill" of a chernorabochii is constant across industry and across time. Secondly, wages may not be a good indicator of skill in a period of rapid inflation.

153. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, p.57. This skill profile does not differ dramatically from that of the factory workforce as a whole. Drobizhev, V.Z., et al., op. cit., p.84, calculated from the 1918 Industrial Census that 34% of the working class were skilled; 34% semi-skilled, 27% unskilled and 5% unknown. However they do not explain their criteria of classification.

The skill structure of the textile workforce was very different from that of the metal industry, having a far smaller proportion of skilled workers, a far larger proportion of semi-skilled workers and a smaller proportion of unskilled. The textile industry was a highly specialised industry with a complex division of labour based entirely on machine production. Skilled workers comprised only 6% of the workforce and were mainly men. Women were the majority of semi-skilled workers who constituted 72% of the total workforce. About 20% of the workforce were classified as unskilled and comprised mainly young girls and boys as well as some ponalichnie or workers 'on hand' to fill the places of absent workers for less than the going rate.¹⁵⁴

In 1917 there were 19,400 workers employed in the printing industry of Petrograd - about 6% of the industrial labour force.¹⁵⁵ During the war the number of printers had declined by over 3,000 but the proportion of women in the industry had increased from 23% to 35%.¹⁵⁶ By 1917 all large and many medium-sized print works were mechanised, but they were still dependent, along with small print shops, on manual skill. Linotype machinery was rare and most type-setting was done by hand. Type-setters, who were the most numerous category in the trade, fell into several kinds, including the aktsident nye, who did specialised and complex compositing, the strochnye, who type-set books and those who type-set newspapers.¹⁵⁷

154. Drobizhev, V.Z. et al., op. cit., p.84; Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.37.

155. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.83.

156. Materialy k uchetu rabocheho sostava i rabocheho rynka, Pg., 1916, p.128; Siderov, K., 'Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody imperialisticheskoi voiny 1914-17gg', in Pokrovskii, M.N., ed., Ocherki po istorii oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, vol. I, M.L. 1927.

157. Shuster, N.A., op. cit., p.38.

The skills and wages of type-setters varied considerably, but en bloc they enjoyed the status of "commanders of the leaden army" and were considered superior to less skilled printers, such as binders, pressers, machinists, etc. The élite of type-setters constituted a labour aristocracy within the print trade. These compositors would often work in a Kompaniya, or exclusive artel', formed to execute a particular job as quickly as possible. They would organise the work among themselves and appoint a starosta (steward) to supervise discipline, hours and wages. The Kompaniya thus enjoyed a high degree of job control, not being subject to close management supervision. The wages which could be earned by the members of a Kompaniya were high - 150 r. a month in 1916 compared to 50 r. earned by an ordinary printer. It was not high wages per se however which made the Kompaniya type-setters labour aristocrats, but rather their position within the authority structure of the enterprise and the distinct cultural world which they inhabited. According to the printers' leader, Tikhanov, "the Kompaniya was a state within a state; no-one knew what it did and it did not wish to know about anyone else".¹⁵⁸ These men addressed one another as "colleague" and looked down on ordinary printers, whom they called "toilers" (truzheniki). In turn, they were addressed by management as "Mister" and always in the polite form. They enjoyed close personal relations with their employers, who encouraged this by paternalist strategies such as giving long-service medals and civic honours to loyal employees. Tikhanov recalls

158. Tikhanov, A., 'Rabochie-pechatniki v gody voiny', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, sb. 3, M. 1925, p.117.

how his boss at Eastertime used to parade around the shop in full regimental uniform, dripping with medals, and embrace each worker three times, saluting him with the words "Christ has risen!".¹⁵⁹

The print trade was one of the few industries in which there was a socially visible labour aristocracy. As we have seen, this was characterised not so much by high wages as by its strategic position within the enterprise hierarchy, its closeness to management and its distinctive values and social practices. The extent to which skilled workers in other industries constituted such aristocracies is difficult to determine. The main source of evidence are wage tables, yet high wages by themselves cannot be considered proof of aristocratic status. In 1915 when the average wage in Petrograd province was 46.7 rubles a month, there were small groups of workers in the war industries who were earning exceptionally high wages of 240 rubles to 300 rubles a month. These comprised 4% of the workforce at the New Lessner works, 3% at Westinghouse, 7% on the railways.¹⁶⁰ In the Baku oil industry and some of the Southern metallurgical industries such groups of extremely well-paid workers were slightly bigger. Foremen (mastera) who engaged in manual work were, in many instances, part of a labour aristocracy, in view of their supervisory functions and their high wages. In the shipyards of the capital it was still common for a middleman to contract with management to do a job and then organise an artel' to carry it out; the middleman would normally earn two to three times the wage of the members of the artel'.

159. ibid., p.122.

160. Shkaratan, O.I., Problemy, p.215.

Such sub-contracting was widespread in the Riga region and in the construction industry generally.¹⁶¹ These sub-contractors can be regarded as a labour aristocracy. Nevertheless, throughout Russian industry as a whole, a labour aristocracy comprised only a tiny stratum and played a far less significant role in the labour movement than it did in Britain. The majority of skilled workers, even if highly paid, cannot be considered as labour aristocrats in any meaningful sense of the term.

The 1897 census revealed that only 21% of the total population of European Russia was literate. This was mainly because of the appallingly low level of literacy in the countryside - 17% compared to 45% in the towns.¹⁶² The spread of schooling in the next two decades helped boost the rate of literacy so that by 1920 a third of the population was literate, including 42% of men and 25.5% of women.¹⁶³ In Petersburg the rate of literacy was the highest in the country. As early as 1900 70% of the population aged six or over was literate and by 1920 this had risen to at least 80%.¹⁶⁴

Working-class literacy was higher than the average for the population as a whole. By 1918 in Petrograd 89% of male workers and 65% of females were literate, compared to 79% and 44%, respectively,

161. Netesin, Yu. N., 'K voprosu o sotsial'no-ekonomicheskikh kornyakh i osobennostyakh "rabochei aristokratii" v Rossii', in Bol'shevistskaya pechat' i rabochii klass v Rossii, M. 1965, p.307.

162. Rashin, A.G., 'Gramotnost' i Narodnoe Obrazovanie v Rossii v XIXv. i nachale XXv.', Istoricheskie Zapiski, vol. 37, 1951, p.37.

163. Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.595.

164. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue IV, 1921, p.23.

of workers in the country as a whole.¹⁶⁵ Working-class literacy was heavily influenced by sex, age and occupation. A survey of 3,998 textileworkers in Petrograd in 1918 showed that only 50% were literate, but of these 74% of men were literate compared to 45% of women.¹⁶⁶ Younger women, however, were more literate than older women:

Table 9
The Relationship of Age and Sex to Literacy among Textileworkers in Petrograd in 1918

<u>Age group</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Both</u>
under 20	83	67	69
21-30	86	45	48
31-40	83	22	33
41-50	68	9	31
over 50	54	1	24

Source: Vestnik P. Soyuzov, no. 2, 1918, p.9.

A survey of 12,000 metalworkers in Petrograd in the same year revealed that overall literacy was 88% - 92% among men and 70% among women. 81% of women under 20 could read and write, compared to 48% of women aged 40 to 50 and 26% of women over 50. Only a quarter of metalworkers aged 55 or over were literate.¹⁶⁷ A survey of 724 skilled fitters at Putilov showed that literacy was as high as 94.7%.¹⁶⁸ In the boiler-plate shop at the Baltic ship works in April 1917 twelve

165. Stepanov, Z.V., op. cit., p.44.
166. Vestnik Professional'nykh Soyuzov, 1918, no. 2, p.9.
167. Metallist, 1918, no. 6, p.8.
168. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy, p.61. There is a comprehensive comparison of working-class literacy by age, sex and industry for 1907 - 1918 ibid., p.495.

out of 93 masterovye (13%) marked a petition, demanding the removal of the shop director, with a cross instead of their signature, which suggests that literacy among skilled fitters at Putilov may have been exceptionally high.¹⁶⁹

A majority of workers in Petrograd in 1917 had probably had some kind of schooling. Primary education made great strides in Russia in the decades prior to the war, but in 1911 still only a third of Russian boys aged 7 to 14 and 14% of girls of the same age were attending school.¹⁷⁰ In Petersburg primary education was more widespread and between 1906 and 1916 the number of primary school pupils doubled to reach 62,418, while the number of secondary school pupils rose to 10,480.¹⁷¹ Although most working-class boys and some working-class girls attended school at some time, only a tiny minority ever completed their primary education. In 1914 a mere 22% of children in Petersburg stayed the full course of primary school.¹⁷² Strumilin estimated that on average most factory workers had three to four years schooling but most women would have had less.¹⁷³ Parents were under great economic pressure to send their children out to work, and once children were set on at the factory, it was difficult for them to continue their education. Even where they worked a six-

169. LGIA, f.416, op. 5, d. 24, l. 21.

170. Rashin, Formirovanie, p.583.

171. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda, 1916, p.24. In 1911 there were 701 factory schools in Russia with 99,100 pupils. One of the best of them was at the Baltic shipyard, where far-sighted employers early realised the advantages of providing schooling for the offspring of their employees. Ivanov, L.M., 'Samoderzhaviya, Burzhuaziya i Rabochie', Voprosy Istorii, 1971, no. 1, p.84; Rashin, A.G., Formirovanie, p.610.

172. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda, 1916, p.24.

173. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy, p.63.

hour day, and where some provision was made for evening classes, few children had the stamina to begin studying after a hard day sorting or cleaning cotton.

Although the ability to read and write was an important prerequisite for becoming a skilled worker, inadequate schooling was not. There was only a slight correlation between length of schooling and level of skills. Factory training was far more important. 67% of a sample of 947 fitters at the Putilov works in 1918 had been apprentices and 32% assistants (podruchnye) to skilled workers. Apprenticeship from a young age was the most likely way to become a highly skilled worker, but one had to acquire a skilled position before the age of 25. Getting into the factory as young as possible, rather than staying on at school was thus the key to getting a skilled job.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion

In spite of conventional images of the proletariat in 1917, the working class which made the Russian Revolution was neither socially nor politically monolithic. In Petrograd the working class was based on the factories though it also embraced workers on trams and railways, on construction sites, in wholesale and retail and in small workshops. Within the factory workforce there were important social divisions according to degree of proletarianisation, skill, sex and age. Social differentiation within the industrial working class of Russia was probably greater than within the working classes of Western Europe, which were longer established and which reproduced themselves. Probably the most important social cleavage within the Russian working

174. ibid., pp. 63-69; Rashin, A.G., Sostav, pp. 118-9.

class was between peasant workers/workers new-to-industry and so-called 'cadre' workers. In Petrograd this division may have been fading in importance in the decade up to 1914 but the influx of peasants into the workforce during the war reinforced its salience. Overlaying this division were divisions between unskilled and skilled workers, female and male workers, young/inexperienced and older workers in their twenties and thirties. These skill, sexual and age divisions within the working class each had their own autonomy and in specific conjunctures of the revolutionary process of 1917 could and did become over-determined. It is not too misleading to think of the working class in Petrograd in 1917 as roughly divided - say 60:40 - between, on the one hand, peasant workers, young workers new to industry and women workers, and, on the other, proletarianised, skilled, male workers over the age of twenty. Crudely speaking, these two broad groups had a different relationship to the organised labour movement and to politics in 1917. A majority of both groups developed a revolutionary consciousness in 1917 but each developed it at different paces and in different forms. Later chapters of this work attempt to explore some of the ways in which the two halves of the working class interacted in 1917.

2.

THE TSARIST FACTORY

A. THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE TSARIST FACTORY

Unlike the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe, the tsarist autocracy's power did not rest on its ability to maintain hegemony among the Russian people. Unable to procure the consent of the governed, it was compelled to rule by force and fear. This was nowhere more apparent than in the sphere of industrial relations. Up to the 1890's the government had refused to believe in the existence of a "labour problem", preferring to entreat employers to show greater solicitude for their employees, and workers to show greater obedience to their masters. Where labour unrest occurred, it was seen as a direct subversion of the peace and was dealt with accordingly by the police or troops. As worker militancy increased in the 1890's, however, the government came to realise in a faltering fashion that repression alone could no longer guarantee industrial peace. Mortally afraid of any independent working-class activity, it began to oscillate between the deployment of force and a cautious, groping policy of ameliorative measures, such as the 1886 Law, the Factory Inspectorate and experiments in police socialism.¹ This vacillation continued after 1905. The gains made by the labour movement in that year were quickly retracted, as the regime reverted from its unhappy liberal mode to the more homely repressive variety. Strikes

1. Rimlinger, G. von, 'Autocracy and factory order in early Russian industrialisation', Journal of Economic History, vol. 20, 1960; Schneiderman, J., Sergei Zubatov and revolutionary Marxism, Ithaca, New York, 1976.

and unions became once again unlawful and workers brave enough to participate in them risked the knout, jail or exile. At the same time, the reformist project was not completely abandoned. The Third Duma engaged in tortured deliberations concerning workers' social insurance, which reached a rather despoiled fruition in 1912, when a restricted law granting accident and sickness benefit was enacted.²

The vacillations in government policy percolated down to industrial relations at factory level. Employers relied mainly on the stick rather than the carrot to run their enterprises. In all countries repressive methods of labour discipline had been typical of the first phase of industrialisation, when labour was only formally subordinated to capital. In Russia, however, real subordination had, by and large, been achieved by 1905, yet arbitrary and draconian forms of discipline continued to be the norm. This reflected less the requirements of capital than the political culture of Russia.³

2. Hosking, G., The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907-14, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

3. Marx argued that under capitalist relations of production labour discipline is necessary, firstly, because "all combined labour on a large scale requires...a directing authority in order to secure the harmonious working of the individual activities"; and secondly, because "the directing motive of capitalist production is to extract the greatest amount of surplus value and thus to exploit labour power to the greatest possible extent". (Marx, K., Capital, vol. I, London: Penguin, 1976, p.549) Under capitalism, however, it is the latter type of discipline - discipline designed to further exploitation - which dominates the former. Once capital both owns and possesses the means of production, the labour process becomes subordinated to the requirements of capital. The social division of labour thus dominates the technical division of labour and this relationship is expressed in the specific organisation of capitalist labour which Marx called the "despotism of the factory". See Poulantzas, N., Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, London: New Left Books, 1975, pp. 224-30.

The violent exercise of autocratic power within the factory mirrored the violent exercise of autocratic power outside.

In 1893 a law had made it obligatory for every factory to have a code of written rules and for these to be printed in the wage book of each worker. These rules covered every aspect of factory life. Some were designed to combat labour turnover, absenteeism and lateness, such as rules at the Obukhov works which prescribed that four whistles would blow at fifteen minute intervals up to 6 am and that all workers should be into work by the third whistle or be considered late and be fined.⁴ Other rules were designed to create a docile workforce which would not offer any collective resistance to management. At the New Cotton-Weaving Mill the rules stated: "Workers must not express demands whilst in the shops nor go in a crowd to complain at the office. Each worker must go personally with his complaint to the manager."⁵ At the nearby Northern Cotton Mill, paragraph 25 of the factory rules laid down that workers might not meet together in the shops, leave work before time, shout or fight, show disobedience or disrespect to management, play games or read newspapers, bring in or take out items without the director's special permission, bring in vodka or alcohol, smoke in unauthorised places, go near or touch machines in operation, go through the boiler room or engine room, or send apprentices or other workers to buy things without the permission of the manager.⁶ Infringement of factory rules usually entailed a fine deducted from one's wages, but occasionally a beating or even dismissal.

4. Pazhitnov, K.A., Polozhenie rabocheho Klassa v Rossii, vol. II, L., 1924, p.176.

5. Semanov, S.N., Peterburgskie rabochie nakanune pervoi russkoi revolyutsii, M.L., 1966, p.110.

6. ibid.

After 1905 some employers in Petrograd tried to modify the system of coercion by introducing certain incentive schemes. A bonus system based on time-and-motion study - the so-called "American system" - was in operation in sixteen factories by 1908, though in themselves bonus systems were not new in Russia.⁷ The searching of workers as they left the factory - a ritual of degradation much resented by workers - declined in frequency. Fines remained widespread, but whereas in the past they had tended to be exacted for absenteeism and general rule-breaking, by 1914 75% to 80% were exacted for bad workmanship. The size of fines tended to decrease.⁸ Not too much should be made of this liberalisation, however. Right down to 1917 industrial relations remained 'feudal' for the most part, and the fact that fines, beatings and searches remained prevalent gives one an indication of how far behind Western European factories Russian factories still were.

The tsarist enterprise was administered in a strictly hierarchical fashion, with a board of directors at the summit, followed, in descending order, by managers, shop-managers and assistant managers, technical personnel, office-workers, foremen and assistant foremen and, finally, workers. In the decade up to the war the larger enterprises of Petrograd were moving towards a more bureaucratic system

7. Istoriya rabochikh Leningrada, vol. I, L., 1972, p.347.

8. Crisp, O., Cambridge Economic History of Europe, vol. VII, part 2 Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.382.

of administration, characterised by detailed centralised planning, special communications-processing departments and the proliferation of white-collar and supervisory personnel. In the majority of enterprises, however, the system of administration remained largely what one might term a 'craft' system, i.e. a decentralised system in which skilled workers and foremen made and carried out most technical and economic decisions at shop-floor level.⁹ Up to 1914 it was the foreman who played the major role in the running of most of Petrograd's factories. He had a wide range of functions of both a technical and administrative kind. He distributed work within the shop and arranged its execution; he set up the machines and materials; he supervised the carrying-out of the job; he checked quality; he fixed piece rates, which at this time made up three-quarters of a worker's earnings on average; in many factories he was also responsible for hiring and firing workers. The shift to a more bureaucratic system of administration - particularly during the war with the extension of mass production - led to a reduction in the functions of the foreman and a more specialised division of labour. The foreman's job became largely supervisory; his more technical functions passed to draughtsmen and mechanics, to instructors, inspectors and sorters.¹⁰ This shift is reflected in the big increase in the number of sluzhashchie in Russian industry.

Sluzhashchie were an extremely heterogeneous social category. The term is best translated as 'salaried employees', since it embraced clerical and technical staff in industrial and commercial enterprises and also in government and other public institutions.

9. See Stinchcombe, A., 'Bureaucratic and Craft Administration of Production', Administrative Science Quarterly, vol. 4, 1959-60.

10. Gastev, A., 'Novaya Industriya', Vestnik Metallista, 1918, no. 2, p.22; Grinevetskii, V.I., Poslevoennye perspektivy russkoi promyshlennosti, M., 1918, p.151.

However, the term had a broader application since it also referred to non-productive workers in the service sector (such as shop workers) and in transport. Rashin estimated that in 1917 there were 250,000 sluzhashchie employed in the factories of Russia, but we do not know how many of these were in Petrograd.¹¹ We know that in 1910 the number of sluzhashchie of all types in the capital was 128,000 or 15% of the total number of wage workers.¹² And in 1918 in Petrograd sluzhashchie in industrial enterprises comprised a quarter of all sluzhashchie. If this proportion holds good for 1910, then in that year there must have been 32,000 sluzhashchie in the factories of the capital.¹³ During the next seven years, however, the number almost certainly increased, for whereas nationally in 1913 there was one sluzhashchii for every 12.3 workers in industry, by 1920 this had risen to one for every 6.6.¹⁴ In 1917, therefore, there may have been as many as 50,000 sluchashchie in Petrograd industry. These were overwhelmingly concentrated in the metalworking, chemicals and electrical industries, where the ratio of sluzhashchie to workers in 1918 was 6.6, 4.3 and 2.4, respectively, compared to 25 in the textile industry.¹⁵

Sluzhashchie in industrial enterprises embraced office-workers, technicians and low-level supervisory personnel. Although foremen were often manual workers, they tended to be seen by workers as part of this same category. Middle and senior management were classified

11. Rashin, A.G., *Formirovanie rabocheho Klassa Rossii*, M., 1958, p.63.

12. Strumilin, S.G., '*Sostav proletariata Sovetskoi Rossii v 1917-19gg*', Dva goda diktatury proletariata, M., 1919, p.15.

13. ibid.

14. Narodnoe Khozyaistvo, 1921, no. 5, pp. 143, 146. Figures calculated by me.

15. Materialy po statistike Petrograda, issue 2, Pg., 1920, p.44.

separately as 'the administration'. Sluzhashchie occupied a contradictory class location. In many ways they were similar to manual workers, since they sold their labour-power, often for wages below those of skilled workers, and had little real power in the enterprise. Some, such as draughtsmen, were close to the skilled workers by virtue of the work which they did.¹⁶ Yet although they may have been 'objectively' close to manual workers, subjectively, sluzhashchie did not feel themselves close. They were at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, but they depended on that hierarchy for their livelihood; and although they were separated by an enormous distance from senior management, they never lost hope of rising to their exalted position. They preferred to try to improve their lot by seeking promotion rather than by organised defence of their collective interests. Furthermore, because they frequently performed semi-administrative functions, they tended to adopt a management rather than working-class viewpoint.¹⁷ Management actively encouraged sluzhashchie to be antagonistic towards the workforce. One super-

16. It took eight years training to become a fully proficient draughtsman and, according to a survey of large Petersburg firms in 1912-14, the average draughtsman was likely to be single, aged about 24, with lower technical education and five years practical training. A draughtsman's copyist was likely to be single, aged about 19, with full primary education and two-and-a-half years practical training. Draughtsmen were well-paid - in 1912-14 they earned 55r a month and worked a 7½-hour day. A copyist earned half the salary and worked the same hours Golos Chertezhnika, 3, 1 October 1917, pp. 6-7.

17. In 1917 M. Kapitsa wrote in the newspaper of the SR's: "Along with their immediate duties (clerical, technical or accounting), sluzhashchie took on duties of a police-administrative character, which placed them squarely on the side of management and which encouraged a benighted class consciousness and a stubbornness which can only be considered as unfortunate, in view of their lack of organisation." Delo Naroda, 124, 11 August 1917, p.1.

visor described his relation to the workers as follows: "Abuse and rudeness, when dealing with workers, are considered an obligatory condition of service. If one didn't do it, one would get the sack at once."¹⁸ The worker Vasenko recalls that at the Nevskaya paper mill in 1913 a foreman was fined five rubles by management because he was caught shaking hands with a worker.¹⁹ It thus comes as no surprise to discover that in general there was no love lost between workers and sluzhashchie.

Conflict between workers and sluzhashchie, particularly between workers and foremen, was endemic prior to 1917. In 1912 at the New Lessner works workers struck for 102 days to get a foreman removed and failed.²⁰ In the spring of 1915 workers in the gun shop at Putilov struck because an engineer hit a worker.²¹ On 15 April 1916 at the new shell shop at the Nevskii ship-building works 180 workers demanded the removal of a foreman who had banned twenty-two of their

18. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the supervisor was talking about industrial relations in the notorious Lena gold-fields to the commission of inquiry into the massacre which took place there in 1912. Such attitudes, however, were characteristic of many lower administrative personnel. Vitko, I., 'Polozhenie lenskikh rabochikh nakanune zabastovki 1912g', Istoriya proletariata, 1932, no. 10, p.163.
19. Vasenko, A., Za sto let, 1840-1940: k stoletiyu Leningradskoi gos. bumazhnoi fabriki im. Volodarskogo, L., 1940, p.99.
20. Payalin, N.P., Zavud im. Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1933, p.325. Demands to be treated with dignity were central to many strikes prior to 1917. In 1917 workers continued to be sensitive to matters affecting both their personal dignity and class honour. At the Triangle works, for example, the conciliation ^{committee} was instructed to investigate disagreements between management and workers "relating to questions of honour, morality and personal dignity"; and "chambers of honour" (Kamery chesti) existed at the Shchetinin aeronautics works, the State Papers print works and elsewhere. See Baklanova, I.A., Rabochie Petrograda v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii (mart-iyun' 1917g), L. 1978, p.75.
21. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, p.17.

number from the factory for two weeks. After four days on strike the administration sacked all 180 workers. Immediately, 5,700 out of 6,300 workers at the factory came out on strike. They demanded the removal of the foreman, a 50% wage increase, the reinstatement of those who had been dismissed and a shop stewards committee (sovet starost). The director, N.N. Kalabin, agreed to the transfer of the foreman to another shop, but this did not satisfy the strikers. On 26 April the director declared a lockout. Sluzhashchie attempted to keep production going by manning machines. Production restarted on 10 May, but only after 600 workers had been fired and 172 conscripted into the army. The workers gained a partial wage increase, but at huge cost.²² Such strikes against foremen and administrators and such strike-breaking by sluzhashchie were commonplace. For the workers on the shop-floor, it was not so much the tyranny of the directors which was resented as the petty despotism of the lower ranks of the management hierarchy. The foremen, supervisors, engineers all exercised their power in the same arbitrary way, untrammelled by any notions of workers' rights. It is thus not surprising that workers who lacked any broad conception of the social system should have identified their main enemy not as the factory owner but as the low-level administrators who were the bane of their everyday working lives.

22. Leiberov, I.P., 'Petrogradskii proletariat v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny', Istoriya rabochikh Leningrada, vol. I, L., 1972, p.499 (henceforth abbreviated as: Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len.); Payalin, op. cit., p.325.

B. CONDITIONS OF WORK

Conditions of work in Petrograd's factories before 1917 were exceedingly miserable. Employers paid little heed to standards of safety and hygiene and provided few facilities for their workforces. There were decent factories, such as the foreign-owned Parviainen and Siemens-Schuckert works, but these exceptions merely underlined the general awfulness of conditions elsewhere. Conditions were notoriously bad at the three factories subject to the Naval Ministry in the Okhta district. In December 1912 an explosion occurred at the Okhta explosives factory which killed five workers and injured more than fifty. The director, General Somov, did his best to prevent the Social Democratic deputies in the Duma from undertaking an investigation into the accident. "Such accidents do happen", he argued, "and will go on happening, and I for one never enter the factory without first making the sign of the cross".²³ He proved to be correct in his forecast, for in April 1915 a further explosion occurred in the melinite shop of the explosives works, which blew up two workshops and eight houses killing 110 people and injuring 220.²⁴ A woman described conditions in the melinite shop, where 3,000 women worked: "In the part where they do the washing and spraying, the air is so suffocating and poisonous that someone unused to it could not stand it for more than

23. Badaev, A.E., The Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma, London, 1932.

24. Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len., p.473; Krasnaya Letopis', 1926, no. 3, p.58.

five or ten minutes. Your whole body becomes poisoned by it."²⁵

On 31 March 1917 yet another explosion occurred at the Okhta explosives works which killed four workers and injured two. A few days later a worker from the factory told the conference of representatives from factories under the Artillery Department: "We are working on top of a volcano. The whole factory is overloaded with explosives, bombs and shells...but the administration says it's not their responsibility and refers us to the Artillery Department."²⁶

Conditions at the Okhta works were notoriously bad - women who worked there could be identified by their yellow skins - but

were not exceptional. At the Putilov works there was no ventilation in the gun shop or galvanising shop, where workers handling acid were given no protective clothing.²⁷ In the gunpowder department of the Admiralty Works, noxious fumes, lead and antimony dust caused vomiting and pulmonary disease among the workers. The manager of the department described conditions thus: "great congestion, a mass of machines, burning oil, night work, poor diet and the excessive intensity of work caused by piece rates have resulted in general exhaustion, acute anaemia and a huge number of lung and heart diseases".²⁸

Conditions were especially bad at factories employing large numbers of women. The women who made cartridge cases at the Cartridge

25. Rabotnitsa, no. 1-2, 10 May 1917, p.12.

26. Pravda, 32, 14 April 1917, p.4. As far as I can ascertain, the three Okhta factories were still subject to the Naval Ministry rather than Artillery Department in 1917.

27. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vesstaniya, M.L., 1965, p.63.

28. ibid.

Works stood on wet, cold floors and suffered permanently from colds and influenza. At the Nevskaya spinning mill women carried heavy basins of wet yarn up to the fifth floor but were not provided with overalls. The women who worked in the chalk shops of the Triangle rubber works constantly breathed in lead dust with woeful longterm consequences.²⁹ Conditions were especially dire too in small factories and workshops. One of the fifty workers at the Petrovskii engineering works complained:

Our factory makes field kitchens. Working conditions are intolerable. The workshops are stone huts in which the temperature falls as low as 20° of frost. The premises are dark and filthy. Colds and chills are the norm, yet we have no insurance against sickness. When there are plenty of orders and materials there are two shifts and we are forced by the boss to work long and exhausting overtime. When there is a lack of orders, which is very often, we are thrown onto the streets, where we spend weeks hungry and out of work. On top of this, you should remember that our pay is miserable and that the boss behaves like some Pharaoh."³⁰

Petrograd had the highest industrial accident rate of any region in Russia. In 1913 there were 14,300 accidents reported to the Factory Inspectorate and rates were highest in the metalworking industry, especially in state factories, and in textiles.³¹ During the war the accident rate increased. At the Putilov works up to September 1914 there was an average of fifteen accidents per month; thereafter this increased to twenty-one. At the Lessner works there were 180 accidents in 1914 but 312 in 1915.³² This increase

29. Rabotnitsa, no. 1-2, p.12.

30. Rabochaya Gazeta, 13, 21 March 1917, p.3.

31. Istoriya rabochikh Leningrada, vol. I, pp. 348, 407.

32. Fleer, M.G., Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody imperialisticheskoi voyny, L., 1926, pp. 65-6.

in the rate of industrial accidents was linked to a general increase in the rate of illness among factory workers caused by more overtime, greater utilisation of female and child labour, speed-ups, insanitary conditions and worsening diet. Between 1913 and 1917 the rate of sickness and injury in Petrograd factories increased by between one-and-a-half and two times.³³ In 1914 the number of cases of sickness and injury at the Metal Works was 60.3 per 100 workers; by 1915 it had risen to 118.4; at the Putilov works the corresponding figures were 64.3 and 98.2.³⁴

The 1912 Insurance Law provided sickness benefit, but not invalidity or unemployment benefit for about a fifth of all industrial workers.³⁵ In Petrograd medical funds (bol'nichnye kassy) were quickly set up to administer the distribution of sickness benefits. These funds were jointly run by workers' and employers' representatives. The Bolsheviks played an active part in these funds, using them partly as a front behind which to organise working-class resistance.³⁶ Workers donated 2% of their wages into the fund and the employers paid a sum equal to two-thirds of the total contribution made by workers. The size of benefit paid was half to two-thirds of the normal wage for a married man and a quarter to a half of that of a single worker.³⁷ Given soaring inflation this was not a great deal. In addition to distributing sickness benefits, nineteen of the better

33. Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len., p.472.

34. Stepanov, op. cit., p.62.

35. The law did not cover workers in state enterprises or factories of under twenty workers, or workers on railways and waterways, in construction and agriculture, in commercial enterprises or domestic service, in Siberia or Turkestan.

36. Milligan, S., 'The Petrograd Bolsheviks and Social Insurance, 1914-17, Soviet Studies, vol. 20, no. 3, January 1969, p.372.

37. ibid., p.370; Leiberov, I.P., Na shturm samoderzhaviya, M. 1979, pp. 52-60.

organised funds set up four district clinics during the war.³⁸ By 1917 there were 80 medical funds in operation in Petrograd, with a membership of 176,000, mainly in the metalworking industry.³⁹

As late as 1914 Russian workers still worked significantly longer hours than their Western Europe counterparts. The 1905 Revolution had reduced hours noticeably, in spite of the fact that it had been defeated precisely at the moment when the demand was raised for the immediate introduction of an eight-hour day. In 1905-6 the average working day in Russia was ten hours, or sixty hours a week, but this figure does not include overtime, which was widespread.⁴⁰ During the Years of Reaction, although pressure for a shorter working day declined, the average working day appears to have shrunk slightly. By 1913 Russian workers worked an average of 9.7 hours a day, excluding overtime; in Petrograd the average stood at 9.54 hours.⁴¹ There was considerable variation by industry however. In 1906 in Petersburg province 66% of textileworkers worked a 60½ hour week; 15% worked 63½ hours; 11% worked 51 to 55½ hours and 8% worked 59 to 60 hours a week. Metalworkers worked about half an hour less on average each day. In the same year, 63% of Petersburg metalworkers between fourteen to sixteen hours a day and baking workers toiled for sixteen or more hours.⁴³ On the eve of the war most factory

38. Leiberov, Na shturm, p.58. In 1917 there were 17 hospitals run by the Petrograd City Duma and about 40 free doctors. In addition there were seven factory hospitals. Baklanova, op. cit., p.53.

39. Rabochie dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1912-17gg., L. 1958, pp. 425-6.

40. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, Izbrannye proizvedeniya, vol. 3, M. 1964, p.479.

41. ibid.; Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue 2, Pg., 1919, p.14.

42. Balabanov, M., Of 1905g. k 1917 godu, M.L., 1927, p.14.

43. Istoriya rabochikh Leningrada, p.405.

workers in Petrograd worked about ten hours each day during the week and seven hours on Saturdays. This does not take into account overtime.

Although the working week in Russia was gruellingly long by Western European standards, the working year was paradoxically shorter. This was due to the large number of holidays enjoyed by Russian workers. In 1913, according to Strumilin, 270 days were worked each year throughout Russian industry - twenty to thirty less than were worked in Britain, the USA or Germany. The average number of hours worked was 2574 per annum - roughly the same as the average in the West.⁴⁴

It is difficult to determine the movement of working hours during the war. Soviet historians argue unanimously that working hours increased in length as a result of the extensive application of overtime. Using official Factory Inspectorate data, however, which may well underestimate the amount of overtime worked, Strumilin calculated that the average working day in Russian industry was 3% shorter in 1914 and 1915 than in 1913 and 1% shorter in 1916. In 1916 he calculated the average working day to be 9.9 hours, including overtime, and the average working year to be 2550 hours compared to 2574 in 1913.⁴⁵ In Petrograd, however, the official data show a lengthening of the average working day. By January 1917 it was 10.1 hours, and longer in the metalworking, textile and leather industries.⁴⁶ This testifies to the big increase in overtime working in industries working for the war effort.

44. Strumilin, S.G., Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v promyshlennosti, M., 1923, p.44; Grinevetskii, op. cit., p.1591

45. Strumilin, Zarabotnaya plata, p.49.

46. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 2, 1919, pp. 14-15.

C. WAGES DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

On the eve of the First World War wages in Russian industry were significantly lower than those in Western industry.⁴⁷ Strumilin estimated that in 1913 the average Russian factory worker earned 283 rubles per annum, but that when one took into account wages received in kind - as welfare provision, housing etc. - this rose to 295r, or about 25r a month.⁴⁸ In Petersburg, in the same year, cash wages were about 40% higher than the national average, but the cost of living in the capital, particularly the cost of accommodation, was higher.⁴⁹ In human terms, these wages spelt chronic poverty. Prokopovich had estimated that one needed about three times the average annual wage to support a family in the city.⁵⁰ How therefore did workers manage?

The largest portion of a working-class budget was spent on food. In 1908 49% of a married worker's income and 37% of a single worker's income was spent on food.⁵¹ Among textile workers in 1912, families where the mother worked outside the home spent 52% of

47. Gordon, M., Workers before and after Lenin, New York, 1941, p.71 cites a study by the British Board of Trade which reckoned that in 1905-8 the family income of Russian workers was half that of German workers, 37% that of English workers and 27% that of American workers.

48. Strumilin, Problemy, pp. 453, 474.

49. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, Pg. 1919, p.54. Payment in kind was less widespread in Petersburg than in Russia as a whole; far less was spent on accommodation by employers and the truck system was less prevalent. (Bernshtein-Kogan, S., Chislennost', sostav i polozhenie peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg., 1910, pp. 120-22).

50. Prokopovich, S. N., Byudzhety peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg., 1909, p.9.

51. ibid.

their income as food, compared to 60% where the mother worked in the home. In poorer textile-worker families, as much as two-thirds of income was spent on food.⁵² A survey of the budgets of members of the works committee at the Baltic shipyard in 1917 showed that 60% of income was spent on food and lighting.⁵³ The second largest item of expenditure for working-class families was on accommodation. Prokopovich's survey revealed that the majority of workers lived in partitioned rooms. Single workers spent 15% of their income on rented accommodation and married workers 21%.⁵⁴ Among textile-workers single women spent 16% of their income on accommodation compared to only 8% spent by single men. Families where the mother was at home spent 19% of their income on accommodation, compared to 12% spent by families where the mother worked outside the home.⁵⁵ In 1917 members of the Baltic works committee spent 14% of their income on accommodation.⁵⁶ The third largest item of working-class expenditure was on clothing. Workers dressed poorly. Men wore a dark shirt or blouse, with a standing collar buttoned to the side, a coarse woollen jacket and trousers tucked inside high boots. In winter they wore very heavy coarse cloth coats, a dark cap with a patent leather visor or a fur hat. Shirts and ties were unknown,

52. Davidovich, M., Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii v ego byudzheta, Pbg., 1912, p.14.

53. Rabochaya Gazeta, 59, 18 May 1917, p.3.

54. Prokopovich, op. cit., p.9.

55. Davidovich, op. cit., p.10.

56. Rabochaya Gazeta, 59, 18 May 1917, p.3.

except among skilled workers who wished to look respectable. Women wore a long skirt, a cotton blouse, a cotton kerchief, or in winter a woollen one, but no hat.⁵⁷ According to Prokopovich's survey, single workers spent 14% and married workers 12% of their income on clothing.⁵⁸ Single male textile workers spent 10% of their income on clothing and single females 17%. In textileworker families 15% or 16% of the budget was spent on clothing.⁵⁹ In 1917 Baltic works committee members spent 12% of their income on clothing.⁶⁰

The outbreak of war unleashed rampant inflation. It is very difficult to produce an index of the rise in prices, partly because of regional variations and partly because of the discrepancy between official prices and market prices. M.P. Kokhn produced what is probably the most reliable national price index for the war years. He estimated that if one takes the level of prices in 1913 as being equal to 100, then at the end of 1916 it equalled 221 and at the end of 1917, 512.⁶¹ There is no comprehensive price index for Petrograd, but patchy data suggest that prices in the capital followed the national pattern, starting to rise as soon as war broke out and then rocketing from the second half of 1916 right through 1917 and into 1918. Officially, food prices rose by 50% between July 1914 and December 1915 and by 150% between July 1914 and summer of 1916.⁶² In the autumn of 1916 prices in the capital began to soar. By

57. Gordon, op. cit., pp. 217-8.

58. Prokopovich, op. cit., p.9.

59. Davidovich, op. cit., pp. 11, 13.

60. Rabochaya Gazeta, 59, 18 May 1917, p.3.

61. Kokhn, M.P., Russkie indeksy tsen, M.L., 1926, p.18.

62. Statisticheskie dannye Petrograda, Pg., 1916, p.38; Sidorov, K., 'Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody imperialisticheskoi voyny, 1914-17gg', in Pokrovskii, M.N., ed., Ocherki po istorii oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, vol. I, M.L., 1927, p.233.

November 1916 the prices of staple commodities had risen since November 1914 as follows: black bread - 125%; milk - 150%; white bread and cheese - 500%; meat and sausage - 200%; fish - 400%; shoes - 300%; overcoats - 300%; trousers, dresses and fabrics - 500%; kerosene - 200%; firewood - 500%.⁶³ Thus the prices of basic items of subsistence were, by the end of 1916, between two and three times higher than before the war, and by the middle of 1917 between three and four times higher.

Wages rose rapidly during the war, partly due to the rise in the cost of living and partly to the fact that more overtime was being worked. The national average wage in enterprises subject to the Factory Inspectorate rose from 257 rubles in 1913 to 322r in 1915 to 478r in 1916. In defence enterprises the average annual wage rose from 393r in 1913 to 594r in 1915 to 9124 in 1916.⁶⁴ According to data from the 1918 Industrial Census the average wage in Petrograd doubled between 1914 and 1916 from 405r to 809r per annum.⁶⁵ Given the rising cost of living what did these wage increases mean in real terms?

There seems little doubt that nationally real wages fell during the war - very slowly during 1914 and 1915 and then increasingly rapidly as 1916 wore on. Strumilin estimates that in enterprises subject to the Factory Inspectorate real wages were 82% of the 1914

63. Sidorov, op. cit., p.242. These figures were compiled by the Okhrana and correspond roughly to price rises in the shop at the Nevskii shipyard (Payalin, op. cit., p.327).

64. Strumilin, Problemy, p.334.

65. Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len., p.477.

level by 1916. The 1918 Industrial Census shows a much more modest fall of 3% during the same period, but this is because it included state enterprises, which did not come under the auspices of the Factory Inspectorate; real wages in state enterprises actually rose rather than fell during this period.⁶⁶ The crucial importance of defence industries in the capital meant that Petrograd was probably the only area in Russia where average real wages rose throughout industry until the winter of 1916 (see Table 10):

Table 10

The average monthly wage measured in commodity rubles¹

	<u>Russia</u>	<u>Petrograd</u>	<u>Moscow</u>
1913	22	34.7	27.1
1914	21.3	37.6	26.1
1915	20.6	38.9	27.9
1916	20.1	35.2	24.4

¹ A commodity ruble is a measure based on the value of goods which could be purchased for one ruble in 1913.

Source: Anskii, A., ed., Professional'noe Dvizhenie v 1917g., L. 1928, p.14.

During the winter of 1916-17 real wages began to fall rapidly in Petrograd and by the time of the February Revolution were probably 15% to 20% below the level of 1913.⁶⁷

There were enormous variations in the wage movements of different industries and different categories of workers as the following Table 11 makes clear:

66. Strumilin, Problemy, p.334.

67. Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len., p.471.

Table 11

Wages of Workers in Petrograd, 1913-16

Industrial Group	No. of employees	1913			1914			1915			1916		
		Real Wage		Absolute monthly wage in paper rubles	Real Wage		Absolute monthly wage in paper rubles	Real Wage		Absolute monthly wage in paper rubles	Real Wage		Absolute monthly wage in paper rubles
		per mth in commodity 1913 rubles	as % of 1913		per mth in commodity 1913 rubles	as % of 1913		per mth in commodity 1913 rubles	as % of 1913		per mth in commodity 1913 rubles	as % of 1913	
Metal-workers	42	42	100	50.2	49.5	118	70.1	54	128	105	51	120	
Textile workers	31	26	100	28	27.7	106	34.8	26.3	101	51	24.7	95	
Chemical workers	17	30	100	41.8	41.4	138	41	31.6	105	69	33.8	113	
Printers	30	56.4	100	54	53.6	95	61	45.4	80	78	38	67	
Food workers	13	28.2	100	26	25	90	28.3	22	77	50.4	24.5	87	
Wood workers	15	41	100	46	45.4	110	48.5	37.3	91	68.3	31.3	76	
Leather workers	6	36	100	34.7	34.3	95	47.2	36.2	100	63.2	30.7	85	
Mineral workers	5	30.7	100	30.2	29.8	97	35	27	88	49.5	24	78	

Source: Istoriya Rabochikh Leningrada, vol. I, L. 1972, p.470.

As this Table 11 reveals, real wages grew between 1913 and 1916 in only two Petrograd industries - metalworking and chemicals. In all other industries they fell - a fall that was particularly dramatic in the case of printers, formerly the highest-paid industry. This meant that compared to other industrial groups, metalworkers were better off in 1916 than in 1913. In 1913 the average wage in the Petrograd metal industry was 63% higher than in textiles, 49% higher than in food and 42% higher than in chemicals. In 1917 the ratios were respectively 106%, 109% and 51%. This pattern holds true for Russian industry as a whole.⁶⁸ The 30% of the Petrograd labour force who worked in textiles, printing, food, woodworking, leather and minerals were thus not only worse off in real terms as a result of the war, but also relative to the high-wage metal industries. Given that no less than 60% of the workforce of Petrograd worked in this high-wage industry, can we infer that an absolute majority of workers in Petrograd improved their wages during the war?

It is extremely difficult to determine how the wages of different categories of workers in the metal industry were affected by war. Firstly, there were almost 300 different occupations within the metalworking industry, and secondly, wage levels varied considerably between factories - even for the same job. In spite of the fact that wages in state enterprises were higher on average than those in private industry, within the metalworking industry wages

68. Strumilin, Zarabotnaya plata, p.7.

in private factories fulfilling war orders were higher than in state factories. In August 1916 the average monthly wage at private metal factories in the capital was 127r.50k., compared to 114r.27k. in state metal works.⁶⁹ In January 1917 average wages in two enterprises run by the Naval Ministry differed as follows. The average monthly wage at the Obukhov works was 171r, compared to only 86r at the Baltic ship-building works.⁷⁰ Bearing these difficulties in mind, is it possible to generalise about the movement of wages of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the metal industry during the war?

It was possible for a layer of very skilled workers in strategic positions within the war industries to earn extremely high wages between 1914 and 1917. Because of this, it is almost certainly the case that the differential between the highest and lowest wages in the metalworking industries widened during the war. By the beginning of 1917 a first-class fitter or turner could earn fifteen to eighteen rubles a day compared to the two to three rubles earned by an unskilled labourer (chernorabochii).⁷¹ It is more difficult to say whether the differential between skilled and unskilled wages, generally, increased. Strumilin believed that the real wages of chernorabochie in Petrograd rose more during the war than did the average wage in

69. Anskii, A., ed., Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g, L., 1928, p.13. The survey from which these figures are drawn showed the wide variation in wages of workers in the same occupation. 3% of fitters and 5% of turners earned over 200r a month; 39% of fitters and 45% of turners earned between 125r and 200r; 20% and 13%, respectively, earned between 100r and 125r and 39% and 37%, respectively, earned less than 100r a month.

70. Stepanov, op. cit., p.52.

71. Baklanova, op. cit., p.23.

industry. He calculated that the average daily earnings of chernorabochie in all industries in May 1916 were 275% higher than in 1914, whereas the average wage in industry was about twice as high. He concluded that in spite of inflation, chernorabochie were better off in real terms, calculating that whereas they had spent 44% of their income on food in 1914, they spent only 29% in 1916.⁷² He argued that the same held true for chernorabochie in the metal industry. In a study of the private Parviainen metal works Strumilin showed that the average wage of a turner rose by 326% between June 1914 and January 1917 and that of a chernorabochii by 375%. The ratio of these two wages thus diminished from 2.2:1 to 1.91:1.⁷³ It is not clear, however, that Strumilin is correct to suppose that the Parviainen works was necessarily typical of the metalworking industry as a whole, for wages and conditions at the factory were amongst the best in Petrograd. Exiguous data from other factories tell a different story. At the Putilov works, for example, the differential in the wages of turners and chernorabochie increased, so that by 1916 a turner was earning 168% more than an unskilled man and 227% more than an unskilled woman.⁷⁴ At the Obukhov works an elite of skilled workers succeeded in gaining very high wages during the war, but the ^{real} wages of unskilled labourers at the factory fell by 21% between 1914 and 1915. At the Metal Works differentials between skilled and unskilled workers also widened during the war. The picture is further complicated by the fact that

72. Strumilin, Problemy, pp. 337, 340.

73. Strumilin, Zarabotnaya plata, pp. 11-12.

74. Vestnik Metallista, 1917, no. 1, p.13.

semi-skilled workers on machines could often earn more than skilled workers because of piece rates. Generalising from this rather contradictory evidence, one can perhaps conclude that until the winter of 1916-17 a majority of workers in the metal industry succeeded in improving their real wages, except in certain factories where unskilled workers failed to keep their wages in line with inflation. This would mean that probably an absolute majority of the workforce of Petrograd managed to improve their wages during the war by working more overtime, by war bonuses and by piece rates. From the winter of 1916-17, however, a sudden acceleration in price rises led to a sharp fall in the real wages of all workers, and this was an important cause of the February Revolution.

One final point needs to be made about the position of the low-paid in Petrograd, who consisted in the main of women. In 1914 adult female wages were on average half those of adult males; teenage boys earned about 40% of the adult male wage and teenage girls earned about a third.⁷⁵ In spite of the increased demand for female labour during the war, women's wages fell in relation to those of men. Between 1914 and the beginning of 1917 the ratio of men's wages to women's wages throughout Russian industry increased from 1.96:1 to 2.34:1.⁷⁶ In Petrograd certain women who worked in armaments factories on piece rates may have earned tolerable wages, but in 1916 the overall wage of women in the metal industry was only 40r, a

75. Strumilin, Problemy, pp. 337, 340.

76. Baklanova, op. cit., p.23.

month, compared to the average wage of 105r.⁷⁶ In the textile industry a woman classified as 'skilled', such as a jenny-operator, earned 49.3r a month in January 1917, which represented 90% of her real wage in July 1914; she now spent 63% of this on food compared to 57% prior to the war.⁷⁷ Most women in textiles, however, were far worse-paid than this. In the printing industry women earned a pittance of 20 to 25r. a month.⁷⁸ For these women therefore, the war brought them from poverty to the brink of destitution.

To conclude, one can say that from the outbreak of war until the winter of 1916-17 the wages of a majority of workers in Petrograd improved, although this improvement came about largely as a result of increased labour intensity and a deterioration in working conditions. For a large minority however - at least a third - the already low wages of 1914 failed to keep pace with the rise in prices and by February 1917 they were teetering on the verge of starvation.

D. THE STRIKE MOVEMENT DURING THE WAR

The wartime wage increases in Petrograd were not granted by the employers out of the kindness of their hearts; they had to be fought for. Although it is not the purpose of the present work to describe the labour movement during the war, a short account of the wartime strike movement must be given, both to provide background to the

76. Baklanova, op. cit., p.23.

77. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 3, Pg., 1919, p.28.

78. Baklanova, op. cit., p.23.

preceding analysis of wage movements and as a preface to the next chapter, which describes the response of Petrograd's factories to the February Revolution.

The following tables provide a comprehensive breakdown of strikes in Petrograd during the war. They are based on I.P. Leiberov's statistics, which supersede those of M.G. Fleer and I.I. Krylova, since they cover not only large and small factories but also public institutions and artisanal enterprises in both the city and suburbs of Petrograd.⁷⁹ Leiberov follows the Factory Inspectorate and Okhrana in classifying strikes as either 'economic' or 'political', but this classification should be treated with caution. The bulk of strikes in each category are unproblematic: most 'economic' strikes concerned wages, hours or conditions; and 'political' strikes took place on occasions such as the anniversary of Bloody Sunday or to protest against government plans for the militarisation of labour, the threatened execution of Kronstadt sailors or the arrest of the Workers Group of the War Industries Committee. Some strikes involved both economic and political demands, however. Leiberov classifies these as political, so there is a bias in the tables towards overstating the number of political strikes.

79. Leiberov, I.P., 'Stachechnaya bor'ba petrogradskogo proletariata v period mirovoi roiny', Istoriya rabochego Klassa Leningrada, issue 2, L. 1963, pp. 166, 177, 183; Fleer, M.G., Peterburgskii Komitet bol'shevikov v gody imperialisticheskoi voiny, 1914-17gg, L. 1927; Krylova, I.I., 'K voprosu o statistike stachek petrogradskikh rabochikh v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny', Iz istorii imperializma v Rossii, M.L., 1959.

Table 12

Number of Strikes in Petrograd, 1914-1917

Month	Political Strikes			Economic Strikes		
	No of strikes	No of strikers	No of working days lost through strikes	No of strikes	No of strikers	No of working days lost through strikes
1914						
July 1-18	-	160099	-	-	580	-
July 19	26	27400	48540	16	10942	76914
August	-	-	-	-	-	-
September	1	1400	280	3	905	1180
October	-	-	-	2	160	42
November	2	3150	1260	3	785	785
December	-	-	-	2	1020	1240
1915						
January	14	2595	2488.5	2	115	565
February	6	340	183.5	2	120	85
March	-	-	-	6	461	311
April	-	-	-	7	4064	9988
May	10	1259	899	7	2571	1607
June	-	-	-	9	1141	531
July	-	-	-	29	17934	33965.5
August	24	23178	24574.5	16	11640	15879
September	70	82728	176623.5	13	7470	12730.5
October	10	11268	34911.5	21	13350	69031.5
November	5	11020	6280	19	6838	7509.5
December	7	8985	5624.5	26	13284	15261
1916						
January	68	61447	64566	35	16418	37749.5
February	3	3200	170	55	53723	220026.5
March	51	77877	386405.5	16	11811	81162.5
April	7	14152	87019	48	25112	47758
May	3	8932	2282	42	26756	125496
June	6	3452	3062.5	37	15603	72191.5
July	2	5333	60025	27	20326	26004
August	4	1686	2761	18	6259	10934.5
September	2	2800	2400	33	24918	84783.5
October	177	174592	452158.5	12	15184	12912
November	6	22950	8283	24	18592	30204.5
December	1	1000	25	7	8798	29835
1917						
January	135	151886	144116	34	24869	59024.5
Feb. 1-17	85	123953	137508	14	19809	62647
Total	1044	826593	1652446.5	585	380978	1148354

Source: Leiberov, I.P., 'Stachechnaya bor'ba petrogradskogo proletariata v period pervoi mirovoi voyny (19 iyulya 1914g - 16 fevralya 1917g)', Istoriya rabocheho Klassa Leningrada, vyp. II, L. 1963, pp. 166, 177, 183.

Table 13

The demands raised in economic strikes during the war

Rough half-yearly periodisation	Total			Economic demands of Workers				Improvement in working conditions	
	No of strikes	No of strikers	Wage increases No of strikes	No of strikes	Reduction in hours No of strikes	No of strikes	No of strikes	No of strikes	No of strikers
I) 19 July - 31 Dec 1914	26	13812	21	8147	1	120	4		5545
II) 1 Jan - 31 July 1915	62	26406	50	23126	5	393	7		2887
III) 1 Aug - 31 Dec 1915	95	52582	76	40744	2	1500	17		10338
IV) 1 Jan - 31 Aug 1916	278	176008	230	142200	9	2661	39		31147
V) 1 Sept - 16 Feb 1917	124	112170	83	69854	4	12162	37		30154
Total	585	380978	460	284071	21	16836	104		80071

Source: I.P. Leiberov, op. cit., pp. 168, 180 and 184.

Table 14

The Success of economic Strikes during the War

Rough half-yearly periodisation	Strikes ending with partial or complete satisfaction of demands				Strikes ending in defeat			
	No of strikes	% of total	No of strikers	% of total	No of strikes	% of total	No of strikers	% of total
I) 19 July - 31 Dec 1914	9	34.6	3042	22	17	65.4	10770	78
II) 1 Jan - 31 July 1915	26	42	14442	54.7	36	58	11964	45.3
III) 1 Aug - 31 Dec 1915	55	58	34038	64.7	40	42	18544	35.3
IV) 1 Jan - 31 Aug 1916	150	54	99397	56.4	128	46	76611	43.6
V) 1 Sept 1916-16 Feb 1917	56	45	48596	43	68	55	63574	57
Total	296	50.5	199515	52.4	289	49.5	181463	47.6

Source: I.P. Leiberov, op. cit., pp. 169, 181, 185.

Finally, one should remember that the economic/political distinction refers to the demands of the strikers rather than to the strikers' motives. It might have taken a certain level of political consciousness to go on any kind of strike during the war, at a time when the press, public opinion and even socialists like Plekhanov considered strike action to be treasonous. One thus cannot impute types of consciousness to workers on the basis of these tables.

The three tables show unambiguously that the outbreak of war in August 1914 defused the insurrectionary mood which had been building up in the working-class areas of Petrograd during the preceding six months. A wave of patriotic support for the war, combined with repression by the authorities, led to the virtual disappearance of strikes until July 1915. The few small, badly organised strikes which did occur, were provoked by management attempts to cut wage rates. The few political strikes during the first year of the war - to protest against Bloody Sunday and the trial of the Bolshevik Duma deputies - were organised by socialists but involved tiny numbers of workers.⁸⁰ The tide began to turn in July 1915 when a successful wage strike by New Lessner workers took place which prompted similar strikes in other metal works on Vyborg Side. News of the massacre of striking textileworkers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk led to political strikes in August, again based on militant metalworking factories on Vyborg Side such as Lessner, Aivaz, Baranovskii, Nobel and Parviainen. These strikes, together with protests against rising food prices, so alarmed the police

80. Leiberov, Ist. rab. Len., p.476.

that sweeping arrests of worker-activists were made between 29 August and 2 September 1915. This repression provoked protest strikes among metalworkers on Vyborg Side, at Putilov and in other districts, mostly under leftist slogans, but some pledging support to the Duma and calling on the creation of a responsible Ministry.⁸¹

Between August 1915 and August 1916 there was a big increase in the number of strikes. Many workers celebrated the anniversary of Bloody Sunday in January 1916 and February witnessed the largest number of economic strikes of any month during the war. Unrest centred on the Putilov workers, where demands for a 70% wage increase became widespread; in spite of a lockout at the factory and the drafting of 2000 militants into the army, significant wage rises were achieved. Some 70,000 workers at the beginning of March came out in support of the Putilovtsy and a strong anti-war mood developed. The crushing of these strikes led to a decline in the movement during the summer of 1916.

In the autumn of 1916 the strike movement exploded on a scale unprecedented since June 1914. Three-quarters of the strikes between September 1916 and February 1917 raised political demands, although the roots of unrest lay in the acute food shortages and rising prices. Economic grievances, however, led into growing criticism of the autocracy and the war. On 17 October workers on Vyborg Side marched to the Finland station singing the Marseillaise. Significantly, they were joined by soldiers from the 181st infantry regiment, who were quartered in the area and who had been the target of Left SR and Bolshevik propaganda. The arrest of the insurgent

81. ibid., pp. 483-5.

soldiers spread the strike and caused the authorities to bring Cossacks and mounted police into the proletarian areas. After news came through of the threat to execute revolutionary sailors in Kronstadt, more factories went on strike, so that by 28 October 77 factories had stopped work for clearly political reasons. A lockout was imposed at fifteen factories and 106 militants were arrested, but the interruption of supplies to the Front forced the government to climb down for the first time since war broke out.⁸²

In the first six weeks of 1917 stoppages, go-slows and strikes occurred in response to plummeting real wages and shortages of bread. The increased failure rate of the economic strikes (Table 14) reflects the fact that workers in small enterprises were entering into struggle for the first time. On January 9, 132 enterprises struck to commemorate Bloody Sunday. The success of this demonstration encouraged the Workers Group of the War Industries Committee to redouble its efforts to persuade workers to put pressure on the Progressive Bloc in the Duma. The authorities reacted by arresting eleven of the sixteen members of the Workers Group on 27 January. On February 14, 58 factories obeyed the summons of the Defencist labour leaders to strike. Within the next week a large strike broke out at Putilov in support of wage increases, which provoked a lockout on February 22. This proved to be an important step in the immediate run-up to the general strike which precipitated the overthrow of the autocracy.⁸³

82. ibid., pp. 502-4.

83. ibid., p. 511.

3. THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION - A NEW DISPENSATION IN THE FACTORIES

A. WORKERS IN THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

At the beginning of 1917 Petrograd was gripped by a bread shortage. Queues extended the length and breadth of the city. Shopkeepers were running out of basic foodstuffs and arbitrarily raising prices on their remaining stocks. Haunted by the prospect of starvation, women began to raid food shops, smash windows and even to beat up crooked tradesmen. Unrest mounted as International Women's Day drew near. February 23 arrived and thousands of angry housewives and factory women surged into the streets, ignoring pleas from labour leaders to stay calm. "The gates of the Sampsonievskii cotton mill were flung wide open. Masses of militant women filled the alley. Those who saw us began to wave, shouting 'Come out!' 'Stop work!' They threw snowballs through the windows (of the Nobel factory, SAS). We decided to join in their demonstration."¹ The women marched noisily around Vyborg Side, bringing out metalworkers from the Baranovskii, Cartridge and Erikson works in support of their demand for an increase in the bread ration. Workers at the Metal Works were holding a general meeting in the factory yard when women from the Havana cigar factory rushed up, waving red banners. One woman climbed onto the tribune and bellowed: "Comrades, we have had enough meetings. Get onto the streets and demand bread and freedom!"²

1. Gordienko, I., Iz boevogo proshlogo, 1914-18gg., M., 1957, p.57.

2. Karpetskaya, N.D., Rabotnitsy i velikii oktyabr', L., 1974, p.33.

In other districts of the city, hoarse, bedraggled working women and soldiers' wives harangued groups of workers and passers-by to join in the day of protest. Little did they realise that this day of protest was about to turn into a general strike.

By the next day, 200,000 workers had downed tools. By 25 February huge armies of demonstrators were clashing with troops and a revolution had commenced. On 27 February the critical point was reached: whole regiments of soldiers began to desert to the insurgents—in stark contrast to 1905 when they had remained loyal to the regime. The same day, the worthy members of the Duma refused to obey an order from the tsar to disperse and instead set up a Provisional Government. Three days later it was all over: the tsar had abdicated and Russia was free.

Both Soviet and Western historians have made much of the apparent 'spontaneity' of the February Revolution. W.H. Chamberlin called it "one of the most leaderless, spontaneous and anonymous revolutions of all time."³ In so far as the overthrow of the autocracy was sudden, unexpected and uncoordinated by any political grouping, the term 'spontaneity' captures something of its quintessential quality. As George Katkov has observed,^{however,} "the theory of 'spontaneity' only serves to cover up our ignorance."⁴ It occludes rather than reveals the processes whereby the general strike and mutiny of the garrison were organised, and it must be emphasised that the 'spontaneity' of the February Revolution did not preclude organisation or leadership.⁵

3. Chamberlin, W.H., The Russian Revolution, vol. I, New York: Universal Library, edn., 1965, p.73.

4. Katkov, G., Russia, 1917: the February Revolution, London, 1967, p.418.

5. Compare Gramsci's remarks: '... pure spontaneity does not exist

Although no political party directed the strikes or street manifestations, there was a whole layer of experienced working-class militants ('sub-elites', in Hasegawa's parlance) who helped to organise these initiatives and to set up popular organisations.⁶ The role of these militants in creating factory committees shall be examined below.

The February Revolution brought into existence an extraordinary situation of 'dual power', in which power was divided between the official Provisional Government, under Prince L'vov, and the Petrograd Soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies, which enjoyed the support of the people. On 5 March - two days after the abdication of Nicholas II - the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet summoned workers to return to work, on the grounds that "the onslaught on the old order by the insurgent people has been successful" and that "a continuation of the strike threatens to disrupt to an alarming degree

in history; it would have to coincide with pure mechanical action. In the most spontaneous movements the elements of 'conscious direction' are simply uncontrollable; they have left behind no documentary proof of their existence. One could say therefore that the element of 'spontaneity' is characteristic of the history of the subaltern class, and even more of its most marginal and peripheral elements... There exists a multiplicity of elements of conscious direction in these movements, but none of them is predominant or goes beyond the level of 'popular science' of particular social stratum, beyond 'common sense', or beyond the stratum's traditional conception of the world.' Gramsci, A., Passato e Presente, Quaderni del Carcere, 6, Turin: Einaudi, 1966, pp. 55-6.

6. Hasegawa, T., 'The problem of power in the February Revolution of 1917', Canadian Slavonic Papers, vol. 24, no. 4, Winter 1972, pp. 611-33.

the economic forces of the country, which already have been undermined by the old regime."⁷ This resolution, the Menshevik and Socialist-Revolutionary (SR) provenance of which is clearly detectible, was passed by a plenary session of the Soviet by 1170 votes to 30. The dissenting votes came from a few Bolshevik-minded workers - the official line of the party was to support the call for a return to work.⁸ In spite of this overwhelming unanimity however, the decision of the EC was not at all popular with workers at the grass roots, a large number of whom thought that there should be no end to the general strike until their aims had been achieved in full. Only 59 out of 102 large factories went back to work between March 6 and 8, and then not out of any enthusiasm for the Soviet decision. A general meeting at the Baranovskii works passed a radical resolution which was typical of the general attitude:-

"Condemning the decision of the Soviet of workers and soldiers deputies to call for a return to work, and bearing in mind that the struggle against tsarism is still not over and that the tsar and a whole host of his minions are not yet isolated, and that the martyrs of the struggle are not yet even buried, we consider the decision to be premature. Not wishing to bring disorganisation into the ranks of democracy, however, we will submit to the decision and return to work tomorrow (7 March) but will be ready to move into action at the first

7. Shlyapnikov, A., Semnadtsatyi god, vol. II, L.M., 1925, p.122.
8. On 6 March the Petersburg Committee of the Bolshevik party turned down a proposal from its Vyborg district committee to call a demonstration against the Soviet decision. 'Protokoly Peterburgskogo komiteta RSDRP (b)', Proletarskaya Revolyutsiya, 1927, no. 3, p.338; see also Longley, D., 'Divisions in the Bolshevik party in March 1917', Soviet Studies, vol. 24, no. 2, July 1972.
9. Baklanova, I.A., Rabochie Petrograda v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii, L., 1978, p.11.

signal. In addition, we advise the Soviet to tell the whole world about the overturn which has taken place here and we call on all nations to join together to end the bloody slaughter, on the basis of brotherhood, love and equality. We also demand that the Soviet enact a decree introducing an eight-hour day."¹⁰ Similar resolutions, expressing disapproval of the call for a return to work but agreeing to abide by it, were passed by workers at the Admiralty, Sestroretsk, Military-Medications, Duflon, Izhorsk and New Lessner works and by 2,000 workers at a meeting on Vyborg Side.¹¹ The latter group demanded that "in future...all serious matters should be put to general factory meetings which will take definite decisions and then inform the Soviet through their representatives."¹² Most of these resolutions stated that the Soviet should work indefatigably to achieve an eight-hour day, a democratic republic, the confiscation of all land and its transfer to the peasantry, an end to the war and a just peace without annexations or contributions.¹³

A handful of factories, such as the Old Parviainen works and the Dynamo works, outrightly refused to end their strike. The resolution of the Dynamo workers bears all the hallmarks of having been jobbed together by the workers themselves:

"We will not submit to the Soviet, because...the wave of revolution has not as yet swept the whole of Russia. In other words, the old power (vlast') is not yet destroyed, and until there is

10. Shlyapnikov, op. cit., pp. 286-7.

11. ibid., pp. 124-5; Pravda, 4, 9 March 1917, p.3.

12. Pravda, 3, 8 March, p.2.

13. See for example the resolution passed by the workers of the Izhorsk works - a stronghold, incidentally, of the SR's. Pravda, 7, 12 March, p.3.

victory over the enemy, there cannot be any talk of liquidating the strike. Yet the Soviet has already decided to liquidate the strike for defencist motives. Instead of making an immediate call to the German people to end the slaughter, it summons us to make shells in order to continue the bloodshed... The people and the army did not come out onto the streets in order to replace one government by another, but in order to bring our slogans to life. These slogans are: freedom (svoboda), equality, land and liberty (volya) and an end to the bloody slaughter which nobody needs - at least, no-one among the have-nots.

This will only come about once the house of the vampire Romanovs is cast from the throne for ever. Yet we see that although Romanov has abdicated, he still goes free. We say that we are still not guaranteed against this vampire trying to stage a come-back into our ✓ lives. You will probably say that such an attempt would get nowhere. We know that, but we also know that such an attempt would nevertheless cost dozens or possibly hundreds and thousands of lives. To be absolutely guaranteed against this, therefore we demand the immediate arrest of the vampire and his family..."¹⁴

This resolution draws on many elements of populist discourse characteristic of the time - not merely in its traditional appeals to land and liberty, its hatred of central government, its deep loathing of the tsar and his family, but also in its pacifist opposition to the war (which does not preclude a hint that the Germans are the chief aggressors) and in its imagery of revolution as a mighty

14. Shlyapnikov, op. cit., p.286.

wave sweeping through society.¹⁵ The fact that this resolution, which encapsulates so much of popular consciousness at the time of the February Revolution, comes from the Dynamo works makes it doubly interesting, for the Dynamo workers, like most workers at this time, were strong supporters of the Mensheviks and SR's. Their resolution shows that support for the two 'conciliationist' parties was quite compatible with full-blooded revolutionary convictions at this stage of the revolution. We shall see in due course that many of the leaders of these two parties at factory level were far to the left of their comrades on the EC of the Soviet.

Finally, the two resolutions which have been quoted - examples of many which could be reproduced - suggest that workers had developed a revolutionary political consciousness, exemplified in their posing of, or support for, demands for an end to the imperialist war, for a democratic republic and for a land distribution. Marc Ferro is undoubtedly correct to argue that this was not a socialist consciousness, but his claim that workers were less interested in political issues than in issues relating to their condition as workers is not borne out by the example of Petrograd.¹⁶

B. DEMOCRATISING THE FACTORY ORDER

The toppling of the Romanov dynasty inspired most sections of society with elation and political optimism. When workers returned

15. For the concept of a 'popular-democratic discourse', see Laclau, E., Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory, London: New Left Books, 1977, pp. 100-103.

16. Ferro, M., The Russian Revolution of February 1917, London: Routledge, 1972, p.121.

to the factories in the second week of March they determined that just as the ancien regime had been swept aside in society at large, so it should be swept aside in the factory. They resolved to create in the place of the old 'absolutist' order a new 'constitutional' order within the enterprise. They set to work at once by tearing up the old contracts of hire and the old factory rule books, with their punitive fines, humiliating searches and vicious blacklists, and drew up new sets of internal regulations. And just as all the agents of the autocracy had been driven from the police-stations and government offices, so workers decided that all those who were most closely identified with the repressive administration of the factory should be driven out of their jobs.

Throughout the factories of Petrograd workers began to clamour for the removal of all members of the management hierarchy who had made their lives miserable under the ancien regime, who had behaved tyrannically, who had abused their authority, who had taken bribes or acted as police informers.¹⁷ Sometimes administrators were removed peacefully, sometimes by force. At the Putilov works the director and his aide were killed by workers and their bodies were thrown in the Obvodnyi canal; some forty members of management were expelled during the first three 'days of freedom'.¹⁸ In the engine-assembly shop, Puzanov, quondam chief of the factory's Black Hundreds, was tossed in a wheelbarrow, red lead mixed with machine oil was

17. Lists of police agents were published in early March in the working-class press after police stations had been ransacked. See, for example, Pravda, 7, 12 March 1917, p.4. As late as May, police spies were still being uncovered, cf. the exposure of Roman Berthold, editor of the anarchist newspaper, Kommuna, Rabochaya Gazeta, 49, 6 May 1917, p.2.

18. Krasnaya Letopis', 1932, no. 3, p.172.

poured over his head and he was ignominiously carted out of the factory and dumped in the street. In the brickyard of the same plant, A.V. Spasskii, the foreman, was deprived of his duties by workers for:

- i) rude treatment of workers
- ii) forced overtime, as a result of which such things had happened as when the worker, S. Skinder, having worked overtime, collapsed at midnight of exhaustion and had to be taken to hospital...'.¹⁹

Such incidents were paralleled in other state enterprises. At the Baltic shipyard at least sixty members of the administration were either demoted, transferred or carted out of the factory in wheelbarrows.²⁰ At the Cartridge works up to 80% of technical staff were expelled and the factory committee refused them leave to appeal to a conciliation chamber.²¹ At the Admiralty, New Admiralty and Galernyi Island shipyards, 49 technical employees were expelled by general meetings of the workers. Management insisted that each employee had the right to appeal to a conciliation chamber, but the latter was forced to recognise the fait accompli.²² At the Pipe Works the director and fourteen senior managers were temporarily relieved of their duties by the factory soviet.²³

Such cleansing of the Augean stables extended to private factories. At the Thornton textile mill women workers chased 30 factory police from the premises.²⁴ At the Baranovskii engineering

19. Mitel'man, M.I., 1917 god na Putilovskom zavode, L., 1939, p.33; Rabochii Kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatiyakh Petrograda, 1917-18gg., vol. I, L., 1947, p.45, henceforward, Rabochii Kontrol'.

20. LGIA, f. 416, op. t, A. 30, l.24.

21. Anskii, A., ed., Professional'noe dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g, L., 1928, (henceforward Prof. dvizh.), p.82.

22. ibid., p.81.

23. Rabochii Kontrol', p.50.

24. Perazich, V., Tekstili Leningrada v 1917g., L, 1927, p.19.

works 25 members of the administration were fired by the workers, eighteen of them being carted from the factory for acting like "hangmen" in the past.²⁵ After long disputes, 12 members of management at the Skorokhod shoe factory and 16 at the Tentelevskii chemical works were dismissed at the insistence of the respective workforces.²⁶ The reasons why workers compelled the removal of administration were multifarious. At the Triangle works on March 5 a general meeting of shop stewards had agreed that "all foremen who are disorganising production by hiding tools, etc. must not be allowed into work. We ask comrades to inform the soviet of workers' deputies of this".²⁷ At the Nevskii shipyard a list was drawn up of foremen and apprentices who had insulted workers in the past. The Menshevik-dominated factory committee forbade the expulsion of these people until their cases had been examined by a conciliation chamber. In only one shop - the boiler room - did the workers refuse to accept the factory committee decision. "We have no wish to come to terms with those who banished us. They used to throw us out by the dozen - now it's our turn to throw them out".²⁸ On 30 March the factory committee allowed those threatened with dismissal to return to the factory pending appeal. One case which came before the conciliation chamber concerned the manager of the metallurgical section, who had come to the Nevskii works in 1908 as a foreman. He had openly boasted that he would "sweep out of the workshop all the sedition remaining from 1905", he had collected information on the politics of the

25. Krasnaya Letopis', 1932, no. 5-6, pp. 189-190.

26. Prof. Dvizh., p.93.

27. Freidlin, V.M., Ocherki istorii rabocheho dvizheniya v Rossii v 1917g., M., 1967, p.129.

28. Payalin, N.P., Zavod im Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1957, pp. 363,366.

workers, established a network of informers and forced the workers to work unpaid overtime. The conciliation committee found that there was no case to answer against him, but so great was the hatred felt by the workers towards him that the chamber was powerless to make them take the foreman back.²⁹ The inability of conciliation chambers to settle cases of expulsion by peaceful arbitration was a general phenomenon. At the Kersten knitwear factory the conciliation committee recommended the reinstatement of all but one of the administrators expelled by the workers. On 16 March, for example, it announced:

We are convinced that V.V. Zhuchaevich is a nervous irascible character who cannot restrain himself in the way that moral tact dictates. However we consider that the charges made against him of contemptuous cruelty, of humiliating workers and, in particular, of giving promotion only to his fellow Poles, are totally without foundation."

The chamber found in relation to another worker that "the charge of rude, shameless abuse of women workers is not supported by the testimony of witnesses and therefore we consider it unproven".³⁰ In neither of these cases was the committee able to overcome the opposition of workers and secure the reinstatement of these personnel.

29. ibid., p.368.

30. LGIA, f. 1278, op. 1, d. 84, l. 6-21. One should not assume that workers expelled administrators solely out of revenge. On the railways, for instance, hundreds of administrators were removed from their posts by the railwayworkers, but N.V. Nekrasov, the Kadet Minister of Communications in the first Provisional Government, remarked that 'in 90 out of 100 cases the removals were quite necessary'. Volobuev, V.P., Proletariat i burzhuaziya Rossii v 1917g., M., 1964, p.178.

Carting administrators out of the factory in a wheelbarrow was a well-established form of protest in the Russian labour movement. Prior to 1917 the working class had had precious few institutional means at its disposal with which to defend its interests. In the absence of formal means of defensive organisation, workers devised other informal ways of defending themselves. One of these was to dump a particularly hated administrator in a wheelbarrow and cart him out of the factory. To contemporary leaders of the organised labour movement this form of action was seen as little more than an expression of blind rage, but it had a deeper symbolism. 'Carting out' was a symbolic affirmation by workers of their dignity as human beings and a ritual humiliation of those who had deprived them of this dignity in their day-to-day working lives. Ironically, it was the employers' newspaper, Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, which came closest to recognising this symbolic dimension when it commented that 'carting out' had the same significance in the factory as did tearing off an officer's stripes in the army.³¹

The expulsion of the old administration was but the negative side of democratising factory life; the positive, and far more important side consisted in creating factory committees to represent the interests of the workforce. Factory committees sprang up mushroom-like in the vertiginous days of the revolution. The establishment of the Soviet on 27 February led to general meetings being called to elect deputies to the soviet. These meetings, particularly those in state enterprises, elected factory committees

31. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 124, 14 June 1917, p.1.

at the same time. On 28 February a general meeting at the Obukhov works elected deputies to the Soviet who declared themselves the nucleus of a works committee, to be supplemented by delegates elected from each shop.³² At the Thornton woollen mill, where three-quarters of the workforce were women, the workers joined in the general strike only on 25 February, when they set up a strike committee of thirty to forty people. Two days later they held a general meeting to elect three deputies to the Soviet, but the women were reluctant to stand for election since they feared that events might yet take a turn for the worse. Finally, they agreed that the three most active members of the strike committee - all men - should be sent to the Soviet and that the strike committee should be transformed into a permanent factory committee. At the Sampsonievskii cotton mill a general meeting on 28 February elected an office clerk, who was a member of the SR party, and a journeyman weaver to both the Soviet and the factory committee. A further seven workers were elected to the latter - none of them with any clearcut political affiliations - and they were later joined by stewards (starosty) elected from each shop.³³

The apparent 'spontaneity' with which factory committees sprang up throughout Petrograd is something of an optical illusion, for there was a strong tradition within the Russian working class of electing stewards (starosty) to represent shop-floor workers before management. This tradition had its origins in the countryside where

32. Freidlin, op. cit., p.17.

33. Perazich, op. cit., p.19.

many villages were accustomed to electing a headman to represent them.³⁴ In 1903, in a vain effort to palliate working-class anger at government refusal to countenance formal, durable trade-union organisation, the government attempted to institutionalise a rudimentary type of labour representation in the shape of starosty. The law of 1905 was significant, not because it initiated the habit among Russian workers of electing representatives, but because it reflected the anxiety of the autocracy to contain a practice of representation which was already well-developed. It permitted workers to propose candidates for the job of starosta, from whom management would then make a final choice. The powers of the starosta were strictly circumscribed, for he could not seek to modify the contract of hire and he enjoyed no legal protection.³⁵ Workers disliked the law, for starosty were rarely able to give decisive leadership in working-class struggles since they were too vulnerable to victimisation by employers and by the state.

It was the 1905 Revolution which signalled the immense possibilities of shop-floor organisation. As the general strike swept across Russia, starosty and strike committees developed dramatically, as organs of working class self-activity and self-expression. 'Factory commissions' proliferated from autumn 1905, adumbrating the factory committees of twelve years later. These commissions began to take

34. This tradition was still very much alive. After the death of Sverdlov in March 1919, M.I. Kalinin was made Chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets and was projected by the media as 'All-Russian Starosta' in an effort to win the confidence of the peasantry. Rigby, T.H., Lenin's Government: Sovnarkom, 1917-22, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.174.

35. For the text of the law on starosty see Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy Rossii v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku, M., 1925, pp. 343-5.

responsibility for all matters concerning the internal life of the factory, for supervising the hiring and firing of workers and for the elaboration of collective agreements on wages. The trade union journal, Professional'nyi Soyuz, in its April 1906 number, noted that: "factory commissions have greatly facilitated the coordination of activity by the working masses and, as agents of workers' self-administration, have gone beyond the limits of narrow factory life".³⁶ However, neither factory commissions nor starosty were to survive the Years of Reaction, except in isolated pockets. In a context of generalised repression it was difficult for workers to maintain any representative institutions.

The invigorating experience of 1905 was not forgotten by working-class militants. From time to time individual factories after 1910 attempted to re-elect starosty. And a resurgence of strike committees occurred in the turbulent years of 1912-14. During the First World War workers elected representatives under the guise of delegates to the board of medical funds (bol'nichnie kassy), though attempts by the Menshevik-led Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee to revive the institution of starosty came to grief. In short, class-conscious workers kept alive the tradition of electing shopfloor delegates to represent their interests during the grim years between the two revolutions. It was on the basis of this tradition that factory committees were formed in 1917.

Once the police apparatus of tsarism had been smashed, working-class militants, with experience garnered during desperate struggles

36. Cited in Sviridov, A.A., 'Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety kak forma organizatsii peterskikh rabochikh v 1917g', Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gos. ped. in-ta, vol. 298, 1971, p.72.

under the ancien régime, set about building on the traditions of organisation and struggle with which they were familiar.

The new factory committees were the offspring of older elective institutions. In many enterprises the committees were initially called 'sovety starost' (stewards' committees), though they later changed their names to 'factory committee' (fabrichnyi komitet) or 'works committee' (zavodskoi komitet). In some factories, like the Pipe Works or Siemens-Halske works, both a stewards' committee and a factory committee existed side by side and it is not always clear what distinguished them.³⁷ At the Triangle rubber works, with its 15,000 workforce, no less than three organisations existed - a works committee, a stewards' committee and a factory 'soviet' of workers' deputies: again it is unclear what division of labour existed between them.³⁸ At the New Admiralty works the works committee had the job of overseeing general factory management, whereas stewards had to mediate between the workforce and administration and settle conflicts which arose.³⁹ In general, factory committees appear to have been elected by general meetings and to have had general responsibilities of 'control' and inspection throughout the enterprise, whereas stewards' committees consisted of those elected from individual shops to represent the workers of that shop

37. Prof. dvizh., pp. 276-7; Novyi Put', no. 1/2, 15 October 1917, p.15.

38. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, p.121.

39. Fabrichno-zavodskie Komitety Petrograda v 1917g Protokoly, ed., I.I. Mints, M. 1979, pp. 112-3 (henceforward Fab. zav. Kom.)

before management.⁴⁰

In the next chapter we shall examine the structure and functions of the factory committees, but first it is necessary to examine the other struggles which arose in the factories in the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution.

C. THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY

Having failed to achieve an eight-hour day in 1905, the workers returned to the factories in the second week of March determined that this time things would be different. The demand for the immediate introduction of an eight-hour working day was top of the agenda for workers at the Putilov Works, the Metal Works, Cable Works, New Lessner, Skorokhod and many other factories. Most of these factories implemented the eight-hour day immediately, often without the formal agreement of the employers. The workers argued that the eight-hour day was necessary not merely to attenuate their exploitation but also to create time for trade-union organisation, education and involvement in public affairs.⁴¹ Many workers expressed doubts, however, lest a reduction in the working day adversely affect production for the war effort. At the Cartridge Works the workers agreed: "to recognise the eight-hour day as basic...but in

40. At the Metal Works the shop-stewards' committee had far greater influence than the works committee. Sergeev, N.S., Metallisty: istoriya Leningradskogo Metallicheseskogo zavoda im. XXII s"ezda KPSS, vol. I, L. 1979, p.375.

41. Gaponenko, L.S., Rabochii klass Rossii v 1917g, M., 1970, p.345.

view of the imminent danger, to try by all means to support our brothers at the Front and to work more than eight hours without question - up to twelve hours or more - if necessary".⁴² At the Nevskii ship-building works the factory soviet of workers deputies, which comprised two Mensheviks, two Bolsheviks and one SR, met with the director on March 6 to discuss the eight-hour day. The director argued that it was impossible to introduce an eight-hour day in the foundries and engineering shops for technical reasons, and that it was practicable only for mechanised shell production. The soviet agreed that "any disruption of the existing technical system at the factory will involve a decrease in productivity and so we must begin work at the normal time, but take the eight-hour day as basic and consider any hours worked over that to be overtime."⁴³ Although the stewards' committee took exception to the 'tactlessness' of the soviet in deciding this question without consulting them, they affirmed its correctness.⁴⁴ Most factories took a similar position at this time: they introduced an eight-hour day but were prepared to work overtime in support of the war effort.

Employers naturally were reluctant to agree to the eight-hour day and in some areas put up a good deal of resistance to it. In Petrograd most employers were in a more conciliatory frame of mind, but it was the clamour of the workers which pushed them into making this concession so speedily. The Menshevik and SR leaders of the

42. Volobuev, op. cit., p.153.

43. Rabochaya Gazeta, 2, 8 March 1917, p.4.

44. Payalin, op. cit., p.349.

Soviet believed that the political gains of the revolution should be consolidated before economic demands were put forward, but they were ignored by the workers. As soon as workers began to implement the eight-hour day unilaterally, the Society of Factory and Works Owners (SFWO), the Petrograd employers' organisation, entered into negotiations with the Soviet concerning a reduction in working hours. On March 10 the two sides agreed to the eight-hour day, the recognition of factory committees and the establishment of conciliation chambers in the factories.⁴⁵ On March 14 the SFWO sent a circular to its members calling on them to recognise the eight-hour day as an "historically necessary measure", "capable of ensuring the future spiritual development of the working class by providing time for self-education and trade-union organisation, the aim of which should be the establishment of correct lawful relations between labour and capital".⁴⁶

The introduction of the eight-hour day led to a diminution of the average working day in the Petrograd area from 10.2 hours to 8.4 hours.⁴⁷ In the metal industry it decreased from 10.4 hours to 8.6 hours; in chemicals from 9.6 to 9.1 hours; in textiles from 9.5 to 8 hours; in the paper industry from 11.6 to 9.8 hours; in wood-working from 9.8 to 8.2 hours and in the food industry from 10.2 to 8.6 hours.⁴⁸ In non-factory industries, particularly in shops and small workplaces, the standard working day continued to be well in excess of nine or ten hours, owing to the poor organisation of the employees and to the fact that an eight-hour day was not legally binding

45. Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 105-8.

46. LGIA, f. 1278, op. 1, d. 183, l.29.

47. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, Izbrannye proizvedeniya, vol. 3, M. 1964, p.4.

48. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue I, Pg. 1918, p.56.

on employers.⁴⁹

The above figures testify to the fact that overtime working continued to be widespread after February. In almost all factories, however, labour organisations insisted on their right to control the operation of overtime working. At the 1886 Electric Light Company the factory committee agreed to overtime working only in case of accidents, urgent repair work or the absence of key personnel.⁵⁰ Elsewhere factory committees pressured management to take on extra workers instead of extending overtime working. From the first, there were a few factories which refused to work overtime on principle, regardless of the war. At the Nevskaya footwear factory the factory agreed at its very first meeting to abolish overtime "for ever".⁵¹ At the Promet armaments factory the Menshevik-dominated factory committee voted 20 against 12 in favour of continuing overtime, but a general meeting of 3,000 workers overwhelmingly overrode its decision.⁵² Women workers, in particular, were adamant that an eight-hour day meant precisely that. A complete ban on overtime was called for by women in Moscow district of the capital on 7 March and by laundrywomen on 19 March.⁵³ At the Vyborg spinning mill the average number of hours worked by male workers fell from 11.4 hours in January 1917 to 8.7 hours in July - including one hour's overtime.

49. Stepanov, *op. cit.*, p.75. See, for example, the complaints of hairdressers about their long hours of work (Znamya Truda, 1, 23 August 1917, p.3 and Znamya Truda, 8, 31 August 1917, p.2.)

50. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 52-3. The same was true at the 1835 Gas Light Company (LGIA, f. 1477, op. 3, d. 1, 1.4).

51. LGIA, f. 1182, op. 1, d. 96, 1.1.

52. Pravda, 11, 17 March 1917, p.4; Rabochaya Gazeta, 10, 17 March, 1917, p.2.

53. Revolutsionnoe Dvizhenie posle sverzheniya samoderzhaviya, M., 1957, p.470; Pravda, 17, 25 March 1917, p.4.

The hours worked by women workers, however, fell from 10 hours to 7.8 hours, with almost no overtime.⁵⁴ Women's refusal to work overtime sprang from the fact that domestic labour consumed so large a proportion of the time not spent at the factory.

As the first signs of economic crisis appeared later in the year, the labour leaders took up the fight against overtime. At the Third Conference of Trade Unions in June, the Bolshevik leader of the metalworkers union, V. Schmidt, urged:

At the present time, the eight-hour day is only a norm of payment and has not actually been put into practice. Overtime is done everywhere, but it must be allowed only in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the unions.⁵⁵

The woodturners' union tried to limit the amount of overtime, but not always without opposition from its low-paid members.⁵⁶ The same was true of the printers' union which took a firm stand against overtime working because of the worrying level of unemployment in the print trade.⁵⁷ This policy had considerable success later in the year as closures and redundancies increased. By October there was very little overtime working anywhere in Petrograd.

54. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue, 3, Pg. 1919, p.20.

55. Reported in Delo Naroda, 82, June 23, 1917, p.4.

56. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 3, 12 December 1917, p.14.

57. Tikhonov, A., 'Rabochie-pechatniki v 1917g', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, vol. 4, M., 1925, p.180. At the Polish typography the owners tried to set on more workers, but the workers objected to this and offered to work more overtime until the union intervened.

D. WAGE STRUGGLES

In addition to a significant reduction in working hours, workers also gained large wage increases as a consequence of the February Revolution. They returned to the factories in March determined that the overthrow of tsarism should signal a dramatic change in their working lives. A deputy from the Narva district told the Petrograd Soviet on March 5: "Surely political freedoms are meant to help workers live like human beings. They should guarantee the minimum conditions of human existence - the eight-hour day and the minimum wage. Freedoms are useless if the old conditions persist."⁵⁸ He was undoubtedly expressing a general opinion, for everywhere workers began to raise demands for large wage rises, payment for the days spent toppling the Romanov dynasty, a minimum wage etc. Although the demands raised by different factories tended to be the same, the struggle to achieve them was conducted on an extremely localised basis. In the absence of trade unions at this stage of the revolution, it was the factory committees which led the wages battles, but in some factories there was very little organisation - merely a free-for-all, in which workers unused to traditions of organised wage negotiation sought to improve their wages by the only method they knew viz. direct action. The result was considerable variation between factories both in the mode of struggle and in the level of achievement of these struggles.

At the Skorokhod shoe factory, which employed 1508 men, 2687 women and 705 young people, workers engaged in a militant, but

58. Sobolev, G.L., *Revolutsionnoe soznanie rabochikh i soldat Petrograda v 1917g.*, L., 1973, p.58.

relatively organised, battle for better wages. Through the factory committee they demanded on 9 March: management recognition of the committee; an eight-hour working day; a dinner break of one-and-a-half hours; a minimum wage of 5 rubles for men, 2r.50k. for women and 2r. for youths; the continuation of a 70% war bonus introduced in 1905; the abolition of payment for one's own materials; double pay for overtime; a joint commission to examine wage rates; payment for the February Days; payment for deputies to the Soviet; the dismissal of undesirable elements and control of hiring and firing.⁵⁹ Management refused to countenance a 47-hour week, but agreed to 48 hours; it resisted with particular stubbornness the demands concerning minimum wages, at first agreeing only to a 20% increase; it agreed to overtime only at time-and-a-half; it refused to abolish fines and insisted on the retention of the system whereby workers bought their own ancillary materials; it agreed only to the factory committee's right to be informed of hiring and firing and to its right to request the removal of an administrator. Management refused to pay members of elected organisations but offered 300,000 rubles towards the cost of a canteen. Almost immediately, it was forced to backtrack on hours, fines and payment of elected representatives when it became clear what was happening in other factories. The wage demands were referred to a conciliation chamber which recommended a 40% increase in the minimum wage. The director, A.K. Hartwell, agreed to this and promised the leatherworkers' union 10,000 rubles. The workers' representatives in the conciliation chamber expressed

59. Prof. dvizh., p.136.

satisfaction with this magnanimity, but they had not reckoned with workers on the shop floor. On March 20 the latter stopped work and a crowd began to shout abuse at the director. After some ugly negotiations, he made some amazing concessions including a minimum wage of ten rubles for men and the abolition of piece rates.⁶⁰

In the textile industry the revolution gave vent to a rash of wage demands, some of which were pursued through explosive, violent confrontations with management, others through patient, even resigned, negotiation. At the two Nevskaya spinning mills women comprised 81% and 90%, respectively, of the two workforces. No factory committee existed at either mill until the end of March, and women drew up extremely moderate lists of 'requests' which they put to management on a shop-by-shop basis. The most comprehensive list was that drawn up by women in the scutching room at the Koenig mill who requested of the English director, Harvey, that they be not asked to sweep the floor after they had finished work (refused); that machines be stopped for an hour each day for cleaning and oiling (refused); that new workers be put on the same rate as older ones ("What will the older women say?", the director replied); that women be paid six weeks' maternity leave (referred to medical fund); equal pay with men for equal work; retirement and injury pensions (no reply).⁶¹ The plaintive tone of the Koenig women's entreaty was not typical of the majority of workers, nor was the obtuse intransigence of the English management typical of employers as a whole.

60. Istoriya Leningradskogo obuvnoi fabriki, Skorokhod, im. Ya. Kalinina, L., 1969, pp. 136-7. The size of these concessions caused great consternation among members of the SFWO, who felt that a dangerous precedent had been set.

61. Linko, G., 'Rabochee dvizhenie na fabrike Kenig v 1917g.', Krasnyi Arkhiv, 58, 1933, pp. 136-7.

The month of March saw a plethora of small-scale, short-lived, often sectional struggles for higher wages. The most effective were those which were organised by factory committees, but 'spontaneous' outbursts of direct action were by no means ineffective in this period. Most employers were prepared to make far-reaching concessions under pressure, so very few disputes developed into strikes proper. At the Osipov leather works a strike broke out on March 8 and at the Cable Works a strike took place from March 16 to March 21, a comparatively long time by the standards of this period - but such strikes were exceptional.⁶² The result was considerable variation in the level of wage increases achieved by different factories, industries and occupational categories. This makes it very difficult to generalise about the overall level of wage rises in the spring of 1917.

Already in the month of March monthly earnings rose on average by 35% to 50% and they continued to rise over the next two months.⁶³ At the Putilov works average monthly earnings in June were 120% to 180% above the January 1917 level and hourly earnings some 240% above.⁶⁴ At the Parviainen works hourly earnings rose by 92% between February and May.⁶⁵ By July monthly earnings as a percentage of earnings in January were, respectively, 270% at the Osipov leather works, 320% at the Paramonov leather works, 270% at the Triangle

62. Baklanova, op. cit., p.21.

63. ibid., p.20.

64. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets v trekh revolyutsiyakh, L., 1933, pp. 327-8. The percentage rises for hourly rates are much larger than the corresponding rises for monthly earnings, owing to the fact that fewer hours were being worked per month after February.

65. Strumilin, S.G., Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v promyshlennosti, M., 1923, pp. 13-14.

rubber works and 300% at the Nevskaya paper mill.⁶⁶ In the absence of global data, one can speculate that nominal earnings doubled or trebled in the first six months of 1917. It is far more difficult to say what happened to real earnings. It seems likely that one would have had to double one's earnings to keep abreast of inflation, so those workers who managed to more than double their earnings would have been better off in real terms by summer 1917, whereas those who did not would have been worse off than in January of that year.

How did the wage rises of spring 1917 affect the relative positions of skilled and unskilled, male and female workers? The Soviet historian, I.A. Baklanova, has produced the following breakdown of monthly earnings of workers aged over 18 at four Petrograd factories in January and June 1917 (Table 15). This table suggests that the wages of the low-paid rose proportionately more than did those of the better-paid. This is borne out by evidence from other factories. At the Parviainen works the hourly rate of a turner rose by 59% between February and May compared to a 125% rise in the rate of an unskilled worker.⁶⁷ At the thirty paper mills of Petrograd male wages rose by 214% in the first half-year of 1917, compared to 234% for female wages and 261% for young people's wages.⁶⁸ At the Nevskii shipyard the hourly rate of a steel-moulder rose by 173% compared to 283% in the rate of a hammer-smith, thus decreasing the differential in their wages from 2.15 to 1.31.⁶⁹ The diminution in wage differentials

66. Baklanova, op. cit., p.33.

67. Strumilin, Zarabotnaya, pp. 13-14.

68. Pischebumazhnik, 1, 16 September 1917, p.12.

69. Payalin, op. cit., p.372.

Table 15

Workers grouped according to Wages in January and June 1917

Monthly earnings	Baranovskii metal works				Semenov engineering works				Skorokhod shoe factory				Nevka woollen mill			
	% of men		% of women		% of men		% of women		% of men		% of women		% of men		% of women	
	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June
in rubles	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June	Jan.	June
under 60	16.3	3.4	51.7	3.6	6.5	-	79	-	9	1.1	54.2	0.5	-	83.6	-	-
60-89	17	2.3	33.7	4.9	22	-	13	35.5	17.7	1.5	36.5	1.7	62.4	16.3	-	-
90-119	20	4	11.3	9.2	18	9.3	3.8	50	32.6	1.9	7.2	7.4	18	-	-	-
120-149	15.3	5.8	2.4	44	15.5	15.8	1.5	8.5	26.8	4.6	1	10.3	8.8	-	81.8	-
150-179	11.3	7.1	0.6	10.7	11.2	17	2.3	6.5	9.1	3.7	0.6	76.7	7.3	-	17.6	-
180-209	7.3	11.5	0.05	8.6	8	13.3	-	-	2.8	5.5	0.1	3	2.9	49	-	0.5
210-239	2.4	11	0.05	6.9	5.9	11.5	-	-	1	14.8	0.04	0.3	-	29.4	-	-
240-269	2	9	-	6.8	3.8	9	-	-	0.5	51	-	0.1	0.4	14.4	-	-
270-299	2.4	7.7	-	3.7	3.6	6.8	-	-	0.06	9.5	-	0.04	-	3.7	-	-
300-329	1.4	10.1	-	1.1	2.3	5.7	-	-	-	2.7	-	0.08	-	1.4	-	-
330-359	0.8	9	-	0.04	1.4	5	-	-	-	1.2	-	-	-	-	-	-
360-389	0.5	7.3	-	0.09	0.6	3.2	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	-	-
390-419	0.3	11	-	0.04	0.4	2.9	-	-	-	0.7	-	-	-	0.1	-	-
Total no. of workers	3014	2095	1990	2117	471	277	130	76	1551	1628	2277	2470	205	214	1970	2000

Source: Baklanova, I.A., Rabochie Petrograda v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii, martiyum' 1917g, L. 1978, p.34.

between highly-paid and low-paid workers was the result of conscious policy on the part of factory committees to try to improve the dire situation of unskilled workers, women workers and youth. However this improvement in the relative earnings of the low-paid was not true of all factories. From Table 15 it would appear that at the Nevka spinning mill men's wages increased more than those of women. And at the Vyborg spinning mill the average hourly rates of male workers rose by 368% between January and July, compared to 327% for adult women, 335% for male youths and 321% for female youths. Moreover better-paid workers of both sexes achieved proportionately bigger increases than the poorer-paid.⁷⁰ This suggests that in factories where workers were not well-organised, groups fought for themselves on a sectional basis. This meant that women textile workers, who did not have the same bargaining power as men in the industry, were unable by their own efforts to secure wage increases as large as those achieved in factories where the workers collectively fought to improve the relative position of the low-paid.

The demand for a minimum wage for the low-paid was valiantly fought for by workers' organisations. At the Metal Works negotiations between the works committee and management over a minimum wage became deadlocked and a skilled worker on the works committee proposed that skilled workers should supplement the wages of the unskilled out of their own pay-packets until the matter was settled. "...We must show our true mettle. Are we the same as the exploiting bourgeois, or are we just a bit more aware and willing to help the

70. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 3, p. 7, p. 14.

chernorabochie? Let us the masterovye lend a hand to our starving, ragged comrades."⁷¹ At the Putilov shipyard management and workers agreed to assign 20% of the annual wages bill to help the lowest-paid, pending a settlement of the minimum wage.⁷² The workers' section of the Soviet took up the pressing question of a minimum wage at its meetings of 18 March and 20 March. Representatives from fifty of the largest enterprises described the sorry plight of the poorly paid which had come about as a result of inflation. One speaker said:

The abnormal conditions in which the working class found itself up to now were maintained only with the aid of the bayonet. The bayonet has fallen, the autocracy is overthrown, but the conditions of the working class remain the same.⁷³

The Menshevik, V.O. Bogdanov, complained about the number of partial, sectional conflicts in the factories and the "continued misunderstanding" between capital and labour, to which the delegate from the Putilov works retorted angrily:

It is the duty of the Soviet to examine our position to look at all rates and standards, to revise them and create a tolerable existence for us, and not be surprised that we raise demands... When the workers arose from their toiling slumber, they demanded just wages, they put forward just demands, but the employers cried: 'Guards! They are robbing us!'⁷⁴

71. Sobolev, op. cit., p.67.

72. Pravda, 15, 22 March 1917, p.4.

73. Cited in Baklanova, op. cit., p.24.

74. Rabochaya Gazeta, 13, 21 March 1917, p.2; Sobolev, op. cit., p.68.

The workers' deputies in the Soviet agreed that a minimum wage of five or six rubles a day should be made legally binding on employers, but the SFWO proposed a minimum of 3r. 20k for men and 2r.50k for women.⁷⁵ The matter was then referred to the Central Conciliation Chamber, at which the workers' representatives argued for a daily minimum of five rubles for men and four for women. The employers' representatives at first resisted this, but then conceded it, recognising that "from the political point of view, we are now living through a time when strength lies with the workers".⁷⁶ This minimum was formally announced on April 22, but the announcement sent few workers into raptures. It was clear that this minimum was already inadequate in the face of soaring prices.⁷⁷

E. MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AFTER THE FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

In the tsarist era the capitalist class in Russia was characterised by economic strength combined with social and political weakness. This arose from the fact that large capital achieved dominance in the economy in the 1890's, not by challenging the political power of the landowning elite, but by relying on the economic and political protection of the autocratic state. The industrial and commercial bourgeoisie thus never really developed into a political force capable of challenging the old order. It was to prove a far less dynamic social

75. Pankratova, A., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v 1917g., M.L., 1927, p.39; Baklanova, op. cit., p.25.

76. Baklanova, op. cit., p.25.

77. Rabochaya Gazeta, 39, 25 April 1917, p.3. It compared badly to the minimums achieved by militant action at Skorokhod (10r.) and the Triangle works (7r. for men and 5r. for women). Baklanova, op. cit., p.22.

class than the proletariat, and this social weakness was mirrored in its internal divisions and in its underdeveloped sense of class identity.

The capitalist class in Russia was not monolithic. Several fractions can be distinguished within it, according to industrial and regional base, degree of dependence on foreign capital, degree of dependence on the state, differences in industrial and commercial policy and differences in political outlook. The biggest fraction of the capitalist class was also the most genuinely Russian section and consisted of those entrepreneurs of the Moscow region, whose wealth derived from textiles and other light industries, independent of foreign and government finance.⁷⁸ The Moscow entrepreneurs tended to pursue a conservative economic policy but a liberal policy in the political arena, playing a minor role in the opposition movement of the Third Duma and supporting the Progressive Bloc.⁷⁹ This political liberalism sharply distinguished the Muscovites from the more reactionary fractions of capitalists, such as the mineowners of the Donbass and Krivoi Rog, the semi-feudal bourgeoisie of the Urals metallurgical industry and the oil magnates of Baku, all of whom depended heavily on foreign capital.⁸⁰ In this respect, they were similar to the strongest fraction of the capitalist class - the industrialists and financiers of Petersburg. They derived their

78. Gindin, I.F., 'Russkaya burzhuaziya v period kapitalizma: ee razvitiya i osobennosti', Istoriya SSSR, 1963, no. 2, pp. 60-65 and no. 3, p.57; White, J.D., 'Moscow, Petersburg and the Russian Industrialists', Soviet Studies, January 1973.

79. Hosking, G., The Russian Constitutional Experiment, 1907-14, Cambridge University Press, 1973.

80. Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 45-6.

wealth from banking and the metalworking industries and were heavily dependent on state orders as well as on foreign investment. Because of this dependence on the government, the Petersburg bourgeoisie was far less active in the social and political arena than its Moscow counterpart.

Although the Petersburg capitalists were positively servile in their attitude to the government prior to 1914, the war put their loyalty to severe strain. It was the Moscow industrialists who held the upper hand in the War Industries Committees, set up to take responsibility for military supplies after the defeat of the army in the summer of 1915, but many entrepreneurs in Petrograd became increasingly sympathetic to it and to the propaganda of the Progressive Bloc. Alienated by its inept pursuit of the war and by the scandalous intrigues of the Rasputin clique, most entrepreneurs in Petrograd were not sorry to see the passing of the Imperial government in February 1917.

The mood of a majority of industrialists after the February Revolution was one of anxious hope. They were confident that the Provisional Government would establish a liberal parliamentary regime which would represent their interests, but they were also acutely aware that the ancien regime had been liquidated only by means of a popular movement, which, they feared, could easily get out of hand and thus endanger the objective of a liberal capitalist system. The paradoxical character of the February Revolution - a 'bourgeois' revolution, undertaken by workers and soldiers - brutally exposed the social weakness of the bourgeoisie, once the crutch of the tsarist state had been knocked from under it. At a national level, the

bourgeoisie was weak in numbers, internally divided, lacking in class consciousness, politically inexperienced and badly organised. The prime task for the capitalist class, therefore, was to organise to promote its interests more effectively and to exert pressure on the new government.

In Petrograd the main employers' organisation was the Society of Factory and Works Owners (SFWO). This had been founded in 1897 and represented all the major firms in the capital. By 1917 it represented 450 enterprises, mainly large factories, employing a total workforce of 280,000. It had seven sections - for metalworking and engineering, chemicals, textiles, paper, wood, printing and miscellaneous.⁸¹ The first number of the SFWO journal in 1917 defined the Society's tasks as 'to search for new ways to develop Russian industry within the framework of capitalism' and to ensure that 'free citizen industrialists and free citizen workers find a common language'.⁸² In April a new council and presidium were established and city district sections were set up, but these did not prove successful and in summer the SFWO was reorganised along industrial lines.⁸³ The weakness of the SFWO was due not so much to defective organisation, as to the inherent difficulties in enforcing a common policy on all members. In spite of the fact that firms who went against SFWO policy risked heavy fines, there were

81. Ganelin, R. Sh., and Shepelev, L.E., 'Predprinimatel'skie organizatsii v Petrograde v 1917g.', Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, sb. stat., M.L., 1965, p.265.

82. Vestnik obshchestva zavodchikov i fabrikantov, no. 1, 1 June 1917. Note the use of 'citizenship' as an interpellative structure. (See Laclau, op. cit., pp. 100-03).

83. Prof. Dvizh., p.102.

often good business reasons why firms should break ranks. In view of the failure to create a unified employers' organisation even in Petrograd, it is not surprising that attempts to create a national organisation came to grief, and that a host of sectional organisations proliferated, each representing different fractions of industry and commerce.⁸⁴

In terms of its industrial relations policy, management in Petrograd factories was faced with a choice of two strategies after the February Revolution. On the one hand, lacking moral authority in the eyes of the working class and inured to a quasi-feudal system of industrial relations, it could attempt to suppress labour unrest and restore the status quo ante. This was the strategy chosen by employers in the Urals and Donbass. On the other hand, deprived of the support of the autocracy and confronted by a labour force in ferment, management could make real concessions in the hope of inaugurating a system of Western-style labour relations. In Petrograd they chose the latter - not so surprisingly perhaps, since there had been moves in the capital in this direction ever since 1905.⁸⁵ They committed themselves, therefore, to dismantling the system of industrial relations based on coercion, in favour of one based on mutual recognition, negotiation and collective bargaining. A circular from the SFWO to its members on March 15 reads:

84. Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 83-4.

85. In Moscow, too, where employers traditionally had pursued a reactionary industrial relations policy because of tight profit margins, the factory-owners resolved to 'renounce the idea of running our enterprises on pre-revolutionary lines'. This did not stop them opposing the eight-hour day, initially. Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 269-70.

Relations between employers and workers have changed radically; speedy, energetic work is needed to initiate a new order in the factories and to re-establish normal work on defence as rapidly as possible.⁸⁶

In practical terms, this meant making four key concessions. Firstly, immediate and sizeable wage increases; secondly, the eight-hour day; thirdly, recognition of factory committees and trade unions, and, fourthly, the establishment of conciliation chambers.

This programme coincided, felicitously, with that of the Provisional Government. The latter set up a Department of Labour within the Ministry of Trade and Industry, which was headed by Konovalov. He declared that the government's aim was to "establish proper relations between labour and capital, based on law and justice". On March 29 he announced the priority reforms of the government in the sphere of labour as being, firstly, the development of trade unions; secondly, the creation of conciliation chambers, factory committees and labour exchanges; thirdly, legislation on labour protection, working hours and social insurance.⁸⁷ This programme had the backing of the SFWO but it was considered dangerously socialistic by the mineowners of the Urals. Once opposition to it began to build up, the government's zeal for reform proved surprisingly half-hearted. It refused, for example, to enact a law on the eight-hour day, setting up a commission to study the 'complexity' of the problem instead.

86. ibid., p.175.

87. Browder, R.P., and Kerensky, A.F., eds., The Russian Provisional Government 1917, vol. I, Stanford, 1971, p.710.

This was a portent of the paralysis which was soon to overcome the labour policy of the Provisional Government.

Conciliation chambers were the centrepiece of the system of 'constitutional' industrial relations to which both the SFWO and the Provisional Government aspired. Conciliation chambers had first appeared in the years 1905 to 1907, particularly in the printing and construction industries. They died out during the Years of Reaction and did not emerge again until the end of 1915, when they were revived by the progressive wing of Moscow industrialists and by the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee. Conciliation chambers were strongly resisted at this time by industrialists in Petrograd, who considered them to be fetters on their freedom of action.⁸⁸ The February Revolution soon changed their minds and they became staunch advocates of arbitration in disputes.

The Menshevik and SR leaders of the Petrograd Soviet were as anxious as the SFWO to set up machinery for arbitration and for the avoidance of unofficial action by rank-and-file workers, such as wildcat strikes. In the agreement between the two bodies on March 10, it was agreed that conciliation chambers should be set up "for the purpose of settling all misunderstandings arising out of labour-management relations". They were to consist of an equal number of elected representatives from both workers and management and were to reach decisions by joint agreement.⁸⁹ In the event of agreement not being reached, the dispute was to be referred to a Central Conciliation Chamber. Izvestiya, the paper of the 'conciliationist' leadership of the Petrograd Soviet, explained the significance of this agreement

88. Kats, A., 'K istorii primiritel'nykh kamer v Rossii', Vestnik truda, 1923, no. 10, pp. 186-7.

89. This distinguished 'conciliation chambers' (primiritel'nye kamery) from 'arbitration courts' (treteiskie sudy) in which an independent chairman had a casting vote.

on conciliation as follows:

The wartime situation and the revolution force both sides to exercise extreme caution in utilising the sharper weapons of class struggle such as strikes and lockouts. These circumstances make it necessary to settle all disputes by means of negotiation and agreement, rather than by open conflict. Conciliation chambers serve this purpose.⁹⁰

In the early months of the revolution the conciliation chambers were very busy. Trade unions had not yet begun to operate effectively and so the wages battle of March and April was largely spontaneous and atomised. The conciliation chambers played an important role in mediating in wages negotiations, but as the unions began to consolidate themselves, the significance of the chambers waned.⁹¹ From the first, many workers regarded the conciliation chambers with suspicion, since they appeared to repress the reality of class struggle and to compete with the factory committees. The general situation was not favourable to the harmonious resolution of disagreements between workers and employers, and where class tension was acute, the conciliation chambers tended to be impotent. The most striking example of this was the general failure of conciliation committees to achieve the reinstatement of managers and foremen expelled from their jobs by the workers.⁹² It is thus not surprising that as early as March, dissenting voices should have been heard at

90. Izvestiya, 33, 6 April 1917, p.2.

91. By the summer of 1917 conciliation chambers existed in most state factories and in 90 private factories of Petrograd. Baklanova, op. cit., p.74.

92. The success rate of the conciliation chambers can be judged by the following figures on the number of cases successfully resolved between April and August: at the Baltic works, 12 out of 160 cases heard; at the Izhorsk works, 7 out of 50; at New Admiralty, 3 out of 29; at Obukhov, 3 out of 20. Baklanova, op. cit., pp. 80-1.

a Convention of factory-owners on Vyborg Side, warning that "the conciliation chambers cannot justify the hopes placed in them, since they do not enjoy the necessary confidence of the workers and lack a firm foundation".⁹³

It is now barely possible to understand why employers should have conceived the factory committees to be part of their scheme for a 'constitutional' system of industrial relations. At the time, however, there seemed good grounds for thinking that factory committees would encourage order in the factories, by acting as safety-valves for the explosive build-up of shop-floor grievances. It is clear from the agreement made between the SFWO and the Soviet on March 10 that industrialists saw the factory committees as an updated version of starosty. In a circular interpreting the agreement, the SFWO emphasised the need for workers to make a "careful choice of people who are able to maintain good relations between the two sides".⁹⁴ A week later a further circular was sent out informing employers that "working hours spent by these people (i.e. deputies, starosty, members of the factory committee and so on), in fulfilling the duties laid down, must be paid at the normal, i.e. average, daily rate".⁹⁵ Until the autumn most employers seem to have financed their factory committees almost totally.⁹⁶ In return for supporting the committees,

93. Cited by Freidlin, op. cit., p.138.

94. Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii nakanune velikoi oktyabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revolyutsii, part I, M.L., 1957, p.512 (henceforward Ek. pol.).

95. Selitskii V.I., Massy v bor'be za rabochii kontrol': mart - iyun' 1917g., M., 1971, p.161.

96. In Moscow, according to A.G. Egorova's calculations, members of factory committees were paid by the owners in 67% of enterprises in summer 1917; by the workers in 20% and were not paid at all in 12%. Cited by Volobuev, op. cit., p.183.

the employers expected to see them operate in a manner that was acceptable. The SFWO therefore put pressure on the Provisional Government to define the powers of the factory committees by law. The labour department of the Ministry of Trade and Industry agreed to set up a commission under Professor M.V. Bernatskii to draft such a law. The commission received submissions from both the labour department of the Petrograd Soviet and from the SFWO and tried to find a compromise between the two. It resisted pressure from the SFWO to give employers the right to remove members of the factory committees, specifying that this might only be done by a conciliation committee. The final law followed the proposals of the Petrograd Soviet fairly closely, though it did not make factory committees responsible for safety or deferments of conscription as the Soviet had suggested.⁹⁷ On April 23 the law was promulgated by the Provisional Government. It provided for the setting up of factory committees: to represent workers' interests vis-a-vis management on questions such as pay and hours; to settle disputes between workers; to represent workers before the government and public institutions and to engage in educational and cultural work.⁹⁸ The law thus defined the functions of the factory committees narrowly: it made no mention of 'control', whether of hiring and firing or of any aspect of production. The aim of the government, as in the legislation on conciliation committees, was not to stifle the factory committees, so much as institutionalise them and quell their potential extremism

97. Amosov et al. eds., *Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Fabzavkomy*, vol. I, M., 1927, pp. 25-6 (henceforward *Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkom.*).

98. Browder, R.P. and Kerensky, A.F., *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 718-20.

by legitimising them as representative organs designed to mediate between employers and workers on the shop floor.⁹⁹ Some employers were disgruntled with what they saw as the excessive liberalism of the legislation, but most tried to put it into operation. Workers, however, were not prepared to have their hands tied by the new law. Most factory committees were already operating on a much broader mandate than that allowed for by the law and so they simply ignored it. At the Nevskii shoe factory, management at the beginning of June sent the committee of starostas a copy of the new law, hoping that this would have a "sobering influence". The committee replied ironically that they considered the law unsatisfactory "since those ministers who enacted the law are no longer with us (there was now a Coalition government, SAS). We now have new ministers and so we should have a new law. The decree which you sent us has already disintegrated in our pockets, so we are asking if you've got anything new to offer. If you have, then send it to us, it will be very satisfactory and we'll be very glad to receive it."¹⁰⁰ So much for the effort to institutionalise class struggle through the factory committees!

It is easy in retrospect to mock the guarded optimism of the employers in March and April, but at the time it was not unreasonable to hope that with the granting of substantial concessions, working-class unrest would subside. For some time in April things really did look hopeful. The industrialists' own newspaper could report at the end of April:

99. See the excellent analysis in Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 326-8.

100. Ek. pol., vol. I, p.545.

According to information received from the Ministry of Industry, during the period April 7 to April 14, work went on normally at the majority of enterprises of Petrograd, and order has more or less been restored.¹⁰¹

Only two weeks later, however, the paper had changed its tune:

In many industrial enterprises workers and employees are putting forward wage demands which go significantly beyond the level established by the conciliation chambers. At some factories these demands are accompanied by violent actions towards managers.¹⁰²

Thus, by May the signs were there that the policy of compromise, favoured as much by the Soviet EC as by employers, was going to prove as bankrupt in the sphere of industrial relations as it would in the sphere of politics.

101. Torgovo - Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 86, 27 April, p.3.

102. Torgovo - Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 98, 13 May, p.2.

4. THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

Organisations similar to the Russian factory committees arose in several of the countries involved in the First World War. In the British engineering industry, particularly on Clydeside and in Sheffield, a powerful movement of shop stewards emerged to combat 'dilution' and the militarisation of industry engendered by the war.¹ In the metalworking industries of Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig, Halle and elsewhere in Germany the revolutionary shop stewards (Obleute) led struggles against the class-collaborationist policies of the leaders of the Free Unions, which spilled over into anti-war demonstrations, support for the Independent Social Democrats (USPD) and finally into the workers' and soldiers' councils (Räte) of the German Revolution. In the Revolution of 1918-19 it was young, semi-skilled workers in the large metal enterprises of the Ruhr and of Halle who were most active, although some skilled craftsmen played a prominent role in the iron and steel industries of older industrial areas such as Remscheid and Solingen, which were threatened by new technology.² In Italy in the metal and engineering industries of Milan and Turin 'internal commissions' (commissioni interni) evolved from organs of arbitration into defenders of shopfloor autonomy against the reformist bureaucracy of the metalworkers' federation (FIOM), and, finally, into mighty workers' councils which led the factory occupations of the 'Biennio Rosso' of 1919-20.³ All these movements

1. Hinton, J., The First Shop Stewards' Movement, London 1973.
2. Geary, D., 'Radicalism and the Worker: metalworkers and revolution, 1914-33', Evans, R., ed., Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany, London, 1978.
3. Williams, G.A., Proletarian Order, London: Pluto Press, 1975; Spriano, P., The Occupation of the Factories, London: Pluto, 1975.

were similar to the Russian factory committees in that they were shopfloor organisations, firmly based in the metalworking and armaments industries. In other respects, however, they were rather different. 'Dilution' was less of an issue in Russia than in Britain, and so it cannot be considered a key cause of the emergence of the factory committees. Moreover, in Germany and Italy much of the momentum behind the council movement came initially from the struggle by rank-and-file workers against the sclerotic trade-union bureaucracy, but in Russia this clearly was not a factor, since trade unions were virtually illegal, and since there had never existed within tsarist society the economic and political space for a successful reformist strategy to be pursued by an oligarchical trade union leadership.

Factory committees did not spring out of thin air in Russia in 1917, their roots lay in the tradition of electing starosty. Factory committees were established in the course of the February Revolution as the means of creating a new democratic order in the factories and as the expression of workers' desire to have a say in the running of the enterprise. In the immediate aftermath of the Revolution there was a further practical reason why factory committees were hurriedly brought into existence.

Factory committees established themselves most quickly in state enterprises in March 1917. For when workers returned to state factories after the overthrow of the tsar they discovered that most members of the administration and many technical personnel had fled, fearing that, as appointees of the hated tsarist regime, they might face vengeance from the workers. In the absence of management,

therefore, and anxious to continue production for the war effort, workers set up factory committees to run the state enterprises.

At the Okhta explosives works the factory committee simply declared itself the new administration.⁴ At the Cartridge Works a collective administration was formed, comprising workers and technical staff.

At the Gun (Orudiinyi) Works a temporary Executive Committee was established on 3 March which consisted of 68 people-mainly workers.⁵

At the Pipe Works an administrative committee, comprising five members of the factory soviet and four members of the administration, was set up to take charge of production, wages and the security of the factory.⁶ On March 16 a council of management, composed of equal numbers of elected representatives of management and workers, was created at the Military-Medications works to "temporarily take on the rights and duties of managing the whole factory and to take full responsibility for the future state of affairs at the factory".⁷

At the Radiotelegraph factory the factory committee confined itself to negotiating wage demands and revising the internal rules of the factory.⁸ What this meant, was that in practice a form of workers' management was established in many state enterprises immediately

4. Reporting on its early weeks of activity, the Okhta works committee noted: 'Because of the novelty of things, the committee got lost in its business for a certain time. The immediate tasks of the factory committee were unclear, so the committee took on not only the task of controlling the factory administration, but the duties of the latter.' Rabochii Kontrol' i natsionalizatsiya promyshlennykh predpriyatii Petrograda v 1917-19gg., vol. I, L., 1947, pp. 178-9 (henceforward Rabochii Kontrol').

5. Selitskii, V.I., Massy v bor'be za rabochii Kontrol', M., 1971, p.38.

6. Rabochii Kontrol', p.44.

7. Revolutsionnoe Dvizhenie posle sverzheniya samoderzhaviya, sb. dok., M., 1957, p.507.

8. Rabochii Kontrol', p.41.

after the February Revolution. As chapters 7 and 8 will go on to show, such workers' management developed only slowly in Petrograd in the autumn of 1917, but in state enterprises it existed for a brief period as early as March. This was the almost unintentional result of the desire of workers in state enterprises to, firstly, overhaul the repressive authority structure of the enterprises, and, secondly, to maintain output of war material in the absence of the old management. Thus for a few weeks, workers found themselves virtually running state enterprises. This did not last, but the experience was crucial in giving birth to the idea of workers' 'control'.

On March 13 the largest factories subject to the Artillery Department in Petrograd met to discuss what demands they should put on the Department. They agreed to demand an eight-hour day, payment for the days they had spent toppling the ancien regime and a minimum wage. Most of the conference was spent discussing the role of the factory committees. Some delegates, like the one from the Cartridge Works, argued that the aim should be "self-management by workers on the broadest possible scale".⁹ The majority of delegates, however, whilst cursing the "ancient fetters which have bound the workers in state enterprises so tightly to the military authorities by means of military discipline", had no wish to see the complete removal of official administration. In their resolution the delegates declared: "Until such time as full socialisation of the national economy, both state and private, shall occur, workers shall not take responsibility for the technical and administrative-economic organisation of production and shall refuse to take part in the organisation of

9. ibid., p.48.

production".¹⁰ The functions of the factory committees were specified as the "defence of the interests of labour vis-a-vis the factory administration and control over the activity of the latter".

Significantly, the conference resolved that "workers, through their factory representatives, have the right to object (otvod) to those members of the administration who cannot guarantee normal relations with the workers, regardless of their technical or administrative capacities".¹¹ The precise character and scope of the "control" to be exercised over management was left conveniently imprecise,¹² partly because many of the leaders of the factory committees under the Artillery Department were radicals, who were prepared to leave the matter to the initiative of rank-and-file workers.

To English ears, this talk of 'control' suggests that workers in state enterprises were aiming to displace management and take over the running of the factories themselves. In Russian, however, the word 'control' has the weaker sense of 'supervision' or 'inspection' and at the Artillery Administration conference delegates were basically talking about supervising management activity. Nevertheless the fact that many, whether intentionally or not, were actually participating in the running of state enterprises at this time made it imperative to define more closely the boundaries of 'control'.

At the beginning of April a meeting of leaders from committees in factories subject to the Naval Department took place, attended by 28 delegates. G.E. Breido, a Menshevik-Defencist and former member of the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee, now a member

10. Amosov, P.N., et al., ed., Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Fabzavkomy, vol. I, M., 1927, pp. 29-30 (henceforward, Okt. Rev. i Fab.).

11. ibid., p.30.

12. The concept of 'workers' control of production' is discussed in chapter 7.

of the EC of the Soviet, denounced attempts by factory committees to run state enterprises by themselves. He stressed that factory committees should confine themselves to 'controlling' the activities of management, and though no-one disagreed with this in principle, a heated discussion took place as to the precise boundaries of this 'control'. The factory committee at the Obukhov works merely reserved to itself the right to make enquiries of management and to inspect accounts, and at the Izhorsk works the committee had simply set up a commission to improve the technical side of production. 'Control' had gone furthest at the Baltic shipyard where the works committee actually kept the financial accounts of the company. Breido severely criticised the Baltic arrangement, expressing a preference for the minimalist programme of the Obukhov works committee.¹³

On April 12 representatives from both the state factories under the Artillery Department and the Naval Department met to further clarify the role of the factory committees. The resolution passed by the conference was imbued with a spirit of democracy and self-activity. It emphasised firstly the 'trade union' tasks of the factory committees, viz. their responsibilities for questions such as pay, hours, employment practices and holidays. Secondly, it repeated the demand that factory committees in state enterprises should have the right to object to members of the administration who could not guarantee normal relations with the workers. Thirdly, it went some way towards clarifying the notion of 'control', by explaining that the factory committee should elect representatives onto all administrative, business and technical organs, whilst accepting

13. LGIA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 3669, ll. 51-2.

no responsibility for any decisions made. Furthermore, it demanded that the committee be informed of management decisions and that its consent be sought before notices were circulated among the workforce. Finally, it called on factory committees in state enterprises to elect representatives onto a Principal Committee of Representatives from Factory Committees in State Enterprises.¹⁴

By mid-April the Artillery Administration and Naval Department had appointed new administrators to all state enterprises and so the factory committees ceased to play a direct part in running them. Nevertheless workers were represented on all organs of administration and a considerable degree of workers' control continued to operate, which was not matched in private enterprises until the autumn of 1917.

Since factory committees came into existence in a completely unplanned way, it is not surprising that they were frequently unwieldy in size and that there was little uniformity in the ratio of factory committee members to the total number of workers. The conference of representatives from state enterprises recommended that in a factory of 500 to 1,000 workers, the committee should comprise 11 to 13 members; in one of 3,000 to 6,000, 13 to 15 members and so on.¹⁵ These norms of representation were ratified by the Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees in August.¹⁶ However, the actual size of factory committees rarely conformed to this pattern. At the Admiralty shipyard 800 workers elected a committee of 24 members. At the Obukhov works, 12,900 workers had a committee of 12

14. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. I, pp. 34-5.

15. ibid., p.33.

16. ibid., p.242.

members, supplemented by 40 starosty.¹⁷ At the Baltic shipyard the works committee originally consisted of 103 members, but proved so elephantine that it had to be cut down to 40.

In large enterprises the volume of business was so enormous, that it became necessary to set up a structure of committees at shop level, of which the works committee became the apex. The Putilov works was one of the first enterprises to do this. Strangely, the Putilov works, the largest enterprise in Petrograd, had been late in establishing a factory committee. This seems to have been due to the fact that the giant enterprise so dominated the life of the Narva-Peterhof district of Petrograd, that the local soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies at first functioned as a committee of the Putilov works.¹⁸ In addition it seems that the non-party and Menshevik majority of the Narva soviet were hostile to the idea of a separate works committee at Putilov, feeling that it might operate as a rival centre of power.¹⁹ However elections to a works committee were eventually held between April 10 and 14. On April 24 the new works committee issued detailed instructions on the setting up of shop committees, which were prefaced by the following remarks:

In view of the fact that the practical business of organising shop committees is a new affair, it is necessary that these committees, which look after life at the grass roots, should display as much independence and initiative as possible.

17. Novyi Put', no. 1-2, 15 October 1917, p.15.

18. Mitel'man, M.I., 1917 god na Putilovskom zavode, L., 1939, p.33.

19. Raionnye sovety Petrograda v 1917g., vol. II, M.L., 1965, p.122.

The success of the labour organisations in the factories fully depends on this. By becoming accustomed to self-management (samoupravlenie), the workers are preparing for that time when private ownership of factories and works will be abolished, and the means of production, together with the buildings erected by the workers' hands, will pass into the hands of the working class as a whole. Thus, whilst doing the small things, we must constantly bear in mind the great, overriding objective towards which the working people (rabochii narod) is striving.²⁰

This passage, which is typical of working class discourse of the time, cannot be interpreted as reflecting a spirit of shop sectarianism, it rather expresses a commitment to grass roots democracy and to self-activity which is characteristic of the time. Nor can it be viewed as a concession to rank-and-file pressure for shop autonomy. The rest of the declaration makes clear that much of the motive for setting up shop committees is practical, i.e. the works committee cannot deal with the huge volume of business facing it and is thus farming out all business concerning individual shops to the shop committees. There is no intention of encouraging federalism - still less, anarchy: the declaration spells out unequivocally that shop committees are subordinate to the works committee.²¹

Nearly forty shop committees were set up at the Putilov works. Their tasks were defined as being to defend the workers of the shop; to observe and organise internal order; to see that regulations were being followed; to control hiring and firing of workers; to resolve conflicts over wage rates; to keep a close eye on working conditions;

20. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets v trekh revolyutsiyakh, L., 1933, p.333.

21. 'Every decision of the shop committee must be minuted and sent to the committee for ratification', ibid., p.335.

to check whether the military conscription of individual workers had been deferred, etc.²² At the Baltic shipyard, the functions of the shop committees were similarly defined. They were to consider all socio-economic matters and demands aimed at improving the workers' lot, although final decisions on such matters rested with the works committee; they were empowered to warn people, including management, if they were violating factory regulations or working carelessly or unconscientiously; they were to represent workers before management; they were to suggest ways of increasing production and working conditions; they had the right to request from management all memoranda and information concerning their shop; they were to settle conflicts between workers or between the workers and the shop management; they were to carry out the decisions of the labour organisations and ensure that all wage agreements were implemented.²³

Factory committees in private and state enterprises quickly developed an enormous volume of business and were forced from the first to create subcommittees, or 'commissions', to deal with specific areas of work. At the 1886 Electric Light Company the new committee set up three commissions on March 2: a commission of internal order, which received notices from management saying what needed to be done and then organised the execution of this work; a food commission and a militia commission. On April 26 a further two commissions were created, namely an education commission and a commission of inquiry into disputes between workers.²⁴ The works committee at the

22. ibid., pp. 333-5.

23. LGIA, f., 1304, op. 1, d. 3669, l.23.

24. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. I, pp. 47-8.

Nevskii shipyard had six commissions, including a militia commission responsible for the security of the factory; a food commission; a commission of culture and enlightenment; a technical-economic commission responsible for wages, safety, first-aid and internal order; a reception commission responsible for the hiring and firing of workers and, finally, a special commission which dealt with the clerical business of the committee. At the Baltic shipyard the works committee had seven commissions, and at the Izhorsk works ten commissions operated.²⁵ At the Petrograd Metal Works no less than 28 different commissions came into existence, involving some 200 workers, apart from the sixty shop stewards.²⁶

Factory committees dealt with every aspect of life, as an examination of the minutes of any factory committee will reveal. In the first two weeks of its existence the committee at the 1886 Electric Light Company dealt with matters as diverse as food supplies, the factory militia, arbitration of disputes, lunch breaks, overtime and the factory club.²⁷ In a typical week the committee of the gun shop at Putilov might deal with the hiring of workers, wear-and-tear of machinery, wage-fixing, financial help to individual workers and the experiments of a worker-inventor trying to invent a new kind of shell.²⁸ Much factory committee business was of a fairly trivial kind. On 28 July the Baltic works committee discussed what to do with a consignment of rotting fish. On 29

25. Sviridov, A.A., 'Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety kak forma organizatsii peterskikh rabochikh v 1917g.', Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gos. ped. in-t, vol. 298, 1971, p.78.

26. Tseitlin, D.A., 'Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda v fevralye-oktyabre 1917g', Voprosy Istorii, 1956, no. 11, p.86.

27. Freidlin, B.M., Ocherki istorii rabochego dvizheniya v Rossii v 1917g., M., 1967, p.129.

28. Fleer, M., 'Putilovskii zavod v 1917-18gg.', Bor'ba klassov, no. 1-2, 1924, pp. 288-99.

September the New Admiralty works committee discussed whether or not to buy scented soap for use in the factory.²⁹ Precisely because of this concern with the detail of everyday life at the factory, however, the committees were considered by the workers to be 'their' institutions - far closer to them than the unions or the soviets, and, consequently, far more popular. Workers did not hesitate to turn to the committee for help and advice. The wife of a worker at the Sestroretsk arms works turned to the works committee when her husband threw her out, although the committee was unable to do much in this case.³⁰ Rather than attempt to describe the work of the committees in all its breadth, the next section deals with six of the areas in which most factory committees were active.

Control of hiring and firing

Having purged the old administration, factory committees asserted their right to ensure that managers and technical personnel henceforward behaved in a respectful way towards the workers. Ceremonies were held in the workshops at which managers and foremen confessed their past misdeeds and resolved to mend their ways. A woman textile-worker recalled:

The journeymen came to us to beg forgiveness. The first knelt down and said 'Women (baby) forgive us!' The others followed in turn. Even Filip, the guard, came up and said 'As I have served the old order, so shall I serve you.'³¹

29. Fabrichno - zavodskie komitety Petrograda v 1917g.: Protokoly, M., 1979, pp. 307, 317 (henceforward Fab. zav. kom.).

30. ibid., p.595.

31. Leningradskie tekstilya, 1927, no. 6-7, p.7.

At the Osipov leather works a foreman publicly proclaimed: "I express most sincere repentance for my past deeds. I am deeply conscious of my guilt and ask you to forgive everything."³² Factory committees made it clear that they would not tolerate managers who trampled on the dignity of the workers. At the Skorokhod shoe factory on 17 May a workers' delegation went to see the director, Hartwell, about the possibility of selling shoes to workers at a 30% discount. Hartwell roundly abused the delegates, who then reported it to a general meeting. The workers discussed his past record of collaboration with the Okhrana and his general abusiveness. It was said that he had recently told a group of workers to "go jump in the Neva". Hartwell was summoned to the meeting to explain himself but denied any misconduct. This so angered the workers that they forced the director to sign a statement of resignation: "By order of a general meeting of workers at the Skorokhod factory, I resign my post as director and pledge to vacate my office within three days."³³

Ill-treatment of workers was by no means the only reason why factory committees expressed objection to, or insisted on the removal of members of the administration. On May 30 the Triangle works committee demanded the removal of a foreman because he was ignorant of his job.³⁴ Technical incompetence was also the reason given by factory committees at the Vulcan engineering works and the Voronin, Lyutsh and Cheshire textile mill for requesting the removal of

32. Golos kozhevnika, 1, 1 August 1917, p.15.

33. Pravda, 26 May 1917, p.4.

34. Selitskii, op. cit., p.125.

specialists.³⁵

Such attempts by factory committees to remove administrative and technical personnel may seem like a swinging assault on the right of management to manage, but they were part and parcel of a general attempt by the committees to control hiring and firing policy which, in its initial stages at least, was motivated more by a concern with basic job security than with dismantling management's authority. The right to know the number of workers being hired or fired was one of the first rights claimed by the committees. The shop stewards' committee at the Phoenix engineering works insisted that no worker be hired without the knowledge of the committee "in view of the fact that undesirable elements may get in, such as looters, former servants of the old regime or people convicted of theft and other unworthy deeds".³⁶ At the Okhta explosives works the committee established control of hiring and firing "so that there'll be no patronage and people will be recruited according to a worked-out plan, and not fired at the whim of an individual".³⁷ At the Tentelevskii chemical works the committee proposed to management that "as a general rule, no worker may be hired, dismissed or transferred from one job to another without preliminary consultation with the factory committee".³⁸ At the Putilov works, the Baltic

35. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, pp. 155-6.

36. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 58-9.

37. ibid., p.180.

38. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule: iyul'skii krizis, M., 1959, p.383.

works, the Admiralty works and many other enterprises the factory committees succeeded in getting workers, who had been fired for strike and antiwar activity prior to 1917, reinstated in their jobs.³⁹ The fact that a prime motive behind the control of hiring and firing may have been job security did not lessen the hostility of employers towards it. For them it represented the wedge which would crack the unitary authority of management within the enterprise and open the way to some terrifying form of 'dual power'. They thus resisted it ferociously.

One of the forms which the right to control hiring and firing took was peculiar to war-time. Some one-and-a-half million workers and sluzhashchie had been granted exemption from conscription to work in the war industries.⁴⁰ Prior to 1917 employers were responsible for checking that their employees had genuinely had their military service deferred. After the February Revolution the factory committees took on this job. They established special 'registration' (uchetnye) commissions to check the exemption papers of the so-called belobiletniki (i.e. white-ticket holders). These commissions were not necessarily an expression of defencist support for the war, for they were set up in the most radical of factories. They were, in part, a response to pressure from soldiers, who were convinced that there were many in the factories who were not there "to earn their daily bread but to hide from service in the army".⁴¹ The result was that hundreds of the urban petit-bourgeois who had come to the factories in 1914 were dismissed at the insistence of the committees.

39. Fab. zav. kom., passim; Leiberov, I.P. and Shkaratan, O.I., Voprosy Istorii, 1961, no. 1, p.56.

40. Selitskii, op. cit., p.19.

41. This was the view of the soldiers who sat on the registration commission at Okhta works, Rabochii Kontrol', p.180.

At the Russo-Baltic works - a radical factory whose workers were among the first to denounce the Liberty Loan launched by the Provisional Government as a means of raising finance for the war - a worker named Weinberg, "the owner of a tea-shop and cafe...who only came to the factory to avoid conscription" was sacked on May 31.⁴² At the Baltic works, as late as summer, when the resentment felt by soldiers towards the 'privileged' workers had died down, the mainly Menshevik and SR committee continued to make regular checks of exemption papers and did not hesitate to dismiss 'yard-keepers' (dvorniki) and other, thought to be merely trying to escape conscription, or even those whose exemption papers were simply no longer in order.⁴³ Even when the war had become the object of venomous hatred to most workers, factory committees continued to check exemption papers since this was felt to be only fair to the millions who had lost their lives fighting for their country.⁴⁴

Factory militias and Red Guards

The February Revolution witnessed the whole-scale dismantling of the repressive apparatuses of the tsarist state. Police stations and prisons were burnt to the ground and on 27 February workers and soldiers invaded the Arsenal, the Chief Artillery Department and the Peter-Paul Fortress, confiscating up to 40,000 rifles and 30,000

42. Pravda, 29, 11 April 1917, p.3; Pravda, 80, 13 June 1917, p.4.

43. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 269, 360.

44. See report on conference attended by 500 factory delegates on Vyborg Side on 22 August to discuss conscription. Delo Naroda, 134, 23 August 1917, p.4.

revolvers.⁴⁵ The same day, the Soviet EC agreed to arm one worker in ten.⁴⁶ The overturned police force was replaced by two rival militias - a civil militia, organised into district and sub-district commissariats, and a workers' militia, brought into being by groups of factory workers. Between February 28 and March 1 workers of Rozenkrantz, the Metal Works, Phoenix, Arsenal and other factories formed the I Vyborg commissariat of the workers' militia.⁴⁷ In the Gavan' district of Vasilevskii Island the Cable Works committee at its first meeting on March 1 agreed to set up a militia, "for now the people itself must protect the locality". It asked for 270 volunteers over the age of 18, including women, to serve in the militia.⁴⁸ Throughout the factories of Petrograd workers were elected or volunteered to serve in these militias in order to maintain law and order in the locality, protect life and property and register inhabitants.⁴⁹ The factory committees established militia commissions and appointed commissars to oversee the militiamen. The latter did not leave their jobs permanently to serve in the local workers' militia, but served according to a rota drawn up by the factory militia commission. At the Metal Works 470 workers served in the I Vyborg workers' militia between March and July, but only ten served for the whole period.⁵⁰ At the Arsenal, Cartridge, Radio-Telegraph, Siemens-Schuckert and Siemens-Halske works factory

45. Ivanov, N.Ya., Velikii oktyabr' v Petrograde, L., 1957, p.42.

46. Shlyapnikov, A., Semnadsatyi god, vol. I, M.L., 1923, pp. 152, 205.

47. Startsev, V.I., Ocherki po istorii Petrogradskoi krasnoi gvardii i rabochei militsii, M.L., 1965, pp. 44-5.

48. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie posle sverzheniya samoderzhaviya, p.448.

49. Startsev, op. cit., p.59.

50. ibid., p.57.

committees lost no time in demanding that management pay workers serving in the militia at the average wage.⁵¹ Reluctantly, most employers agreed to do so.

In some factories workers' militias not only had the task of protecting law and order in the locality, but also of guarding the premises and property of the factory. In most enterprises, however, a special militia was created to guard the factory, which was directly subject to the factory committee or its militia commission. At the Pipe Works there were some 90 workers who served in the second and fifth commissariats of the Vasilevskii Island workers' militia, and in addition, the works committee deployed 28 sentries at the various depots and stores in the factory and six guards at the factory gates.⁵² Initially the SFWO urged employers to pay workers doing guard duty at their factories at the ordinary rate of pay.⁵³

From the first there was rivalry between the workers' militias, subject to the factory committees, and the civil militias, subject to the municipal dumas. On 7 March the Soviet EC decided that the workers' militias should be absorbed into the civil militia.⁵⁴ Only the Bolsheviks denounced this decision, but they echoed the feelings of many workers at the grass roots.⁵⁵ The Cable workers declared:

This attack (on the workers' militias, SAS), begun by the bourgeois municipal duma, provokes our deep protest. We suggest that at the present time, when the democracy is faced with a struggle for a democratic republic, a struggle against the vestiges

51. Tseitlin, op. cit., pp. 89-90.

52. Selitskii, op. cit., p.43.

53. LGIA, f. 1278, op. 1, d. 183, l.36.

54. Startsev, op. cit., p.48.

55. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie posle sverzheniya samoderzhaviya, pp. 56-8; Pervyi legal'nyi komitet :sbornik materialov i protokolov zasedanii Peterburgskogo komiteta RSDRP(b), M.L., 1927, p.36.

of tsarism and against the constitutional-monarchist aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the workers' militia should be placed at the head of the popular civil (obyvatel'skoi) militia.⁵⁶

In areas where strong commissariats of the workers' militia existed, they managed to resist absorption into the civil militia. At the end of March some 10,000 militiamen, out of a total of 20,000, were organised into specifically workers' militias.⁵⁷ As the civil militia came to control most districts of Petrograd, however, increasing pressure was put on the workers' militias to dissolve. The city and district dumas urged factory owners to stop paying the wages of militiamen in order to force them to become full-time militiamen employed by the local authority (at much lower rates of pay than they were getting in the factories, incidentally) or else to go back to their jobs in the factories. This campaign seems to have had some success, for by the end of May there were only 2,000 workers left in exclusively workers' militias.⁵⁸ In the same period

56. 'Iz istorii krasnoi gvardii', Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1957, no. 5, pp. 122-3.

57. Startsev, op. cit., p.52.

58. ibid., pp. 66-9. At the Metal Works the number of workers in the I Vyborg workers' militia fell from 266 in March to 140 in April to 40 in May. V. Vinogradov recalled: 'And so, after long ordeals, the factory militia was refused payment of its wages out of factory funds, as a result of which some of the workers who wished to remain in the militia had to submit to the Petrograd government and join the civil militia; the rest - the most conscious workers - not wishing to lose contact with the factory, could do nothing but return to their machines.' (Vinogradov, V., 'Krasnaya guardiya Petrogradskogo metallicheseskogo zavoda', Krasnaya Letopis', 1917, no. 2 (23), p.166). The historian of the factory, however, gives another explanation. 'Some, especially the young workers, were attracted by the romance...but as soon as it became clear that service in the militia was hard, ceaseless, demanding great effort and risk, the detachment began to melt away as quickly as it had arisen.' (Sergeev, N.S., Metallisty: istoriya Leningradskogo metallicheseskogo zavoda im. XXII s"ezda KPSS, vol. I, L., 1967, p.400.

however, the number of civil militia fell from 20,000 to 6,000, so members of the workers' militias still comprised about a third of the total.

On May 27 a conference of Petrograd workers' militias took place which poured obloquy on the Soviet EC and the municipal dumas for their efforts to integrate the workers' militias into the civil militia. The conference agreed that they intended to impose on the populace "a police force of the Western-European type which is hated throughout the world by the majority of the people, the poorer classes".⁵⁹ The conference agreed to Bolshevik proposals for the reorganisation of the workers' militia "as a transitional stage towards the general arming of the whole population of Petrograd".⁶⁰ Many factory committees came out in support of the decisions of the conference, insisting that employers continue to pay the wages of the workers' militias. This was true even of committees consisting mainly of Mensheviks and SR's, such as those at the Baltic and Admiralty works, in spite of the fact that the official line of both parties was to unequivocally oppose the workers' militias.⁶¹ Although the Bolshevik-dominated soviet of Vyborg district supported the workers' militias all along, in the wake of the conference, other district soviets came out in favour of elected workers' militias paid for by the capitalists.⁶²

In the spring of 1917 the Bolsheviks began to press for the creation of Red Guards.⁶³ The Red Guards were rather different

59. Startsev, op. cit., p.74.

60. ibid., p.64.

61. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 71, 451.

62. Startsev, op. cit., pp. 79-82.

63. ibid., pp. 104-7.

from the workers' militias, in that they had the overtly political aim of defending the gains of the February Revolution. On April 17 a meeting of worker militiamen elected a commission, made up of two Bolsheviks and three Mensheviks, to draw up a constitution for a city-wide organisation of Red Guards. This commission explained that a Red Guard would be "a threat to all counter-revolutionary attempts from whatever quarter, since only the armed working class can be the real defender of that freedom which we have won".⁶⁴

Certain factory committees also called for the setting-up of factory Red Guards. On April 16 the Renault metalworkers, in one of the first resolutions calling for a soviet government, demanded inter alia "the organisation of a Red Guard and the arming of the whole people".⁶⁵ On April 22 6,000 workers at the Skorokhod shoe factory declared:

Dark forces...threaten to encroach on the foundation of free Russia. Since we wish to protect the interests of the toiling masses, as well as general state interests (which can only be defended by the people themselves), we declare that we will call on the Soviet to assist us in obtaining arms to organise a Popular Red Guard of 1,000 people.⁶⁶

Red Guards were set up at the New and Old Lessner Works, Erikson, Aivaz, New Parviainen, i.e. in precisely that minority of factories where Bolshevik strength was already great.

On April 26, the Peterhof district soviet called on workers to enrol in the Red Guards, but warned:

64. Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1957, no. 5, p.124.

65. Leningradskie rabochie v bor'be za vlast' sovetov, L., 1924, p.24.

66. ibid., p.23.

Only the flower of the working class may join. We must have a guarantee that no unworthy or wavering people enter its ranks. Everyone wishing to enroll in the Red Guard must be recommended by the district committee of a socialist party.⁶⁷

Two days later, the Vyborg district soviet announced that it intended to transform the two district workers' militias into a Red Guard, whose tasks would be:-

- a) to struggle against counter-revolutionary, antipopular intrigues by the ruling class;
- b) to defend, with weapons in hand, all the gains of the working class;
- c) to protect the life, safety and property of all citizens without distinction of sex, age or nationality.⁶⁸

On April 28, 156 delegates from 90 factories, most of them belonging to no political party, attended a conference to discuss further the creation of Red Guards.⁶⁹ The Soviet EC condemned the conference as a "direct threat to the unity of the revolutionary forces". The Mensheviks blamed it on agitation by 'Leninists' and said that the attempt to create Red Guards revealed a deplorable lack of confidence in the army.⁷⁰

Although the number of Red Guards may have grown slightly during May and June, the Soviet EC successfully blocked plans for the creation

67. Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1957, no. 5, p.125. This summons was prefaced with the words: 'The emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves.'

68. Pravda, 44, 29 April 1917, p.4.

69. Novaya Zhizn', 10, 29 April 1917, p.4.

70. Rabochaya Gazeta, 43, 29 April 1917, p.1; Izvestiya, 29 April 1917, p.1.

of a city-wide network of Red Guards.⁷¹ Because of the political difficulties involved in openly organising Red Guards at this time, the radicals appear to have rechannelled their energies into the workers' militias. On June 3 the second conference of workers' militias elected a Council of the Petrograd Popular Militia. This consisted of eleven members, including an anarchist chairman, seven Bolsheviks and at least one Left SR.⁷² It was this Council, rather than the embryonic Red Guards, which was to play a key role in events leading up to the July Days, i.e. the attempted uprising against the Kerensky government by workers and soldiers. On June 21 the Council hastily summoned a meeting of workers' militias to discuss the ejection by troops of anarchists from the Durnovo villa, which had taken place two days previously. This meeting fiercely denounced the role played by the civil militia in this incident and resolved to "defend the elective basis of the popular militia of revolutionary workers and soldiers by every means, up to and including armed action".⁷³ Over the next couple of weeks the Council whipped up a furore among the workers of Vyborg Side at the purportedly antidemocratic and counter-revolutionary activities of the municipal dumas,

71. Startsev estimates that by the end of June as many as 52 factories had contingents of Red Guards, numbering more than 5,000 members (Startsev, op. cit., p.129). Many of these, however, must have been units of workers' militia rather than the more politicised Red Guards. An earlier Soviet historian is surely correct to say that 'down to the Kornilov rebellion, the Red Guard was not a broad mass organisation'. (Pinezhskii, E., Krasnaya gvardiya, 2nd ed., M., 1933, p.33).

72. Startsev, op. cit., pp. 82-3.

73. ibid., p.86.

arguing that "a blow against the militias is a blow against the revolution".⁷⁴ In agitating for an armed demonstration against the government at the beginning of July, the Bolsheviks on the Council acted quite outside the control of the party Central Committee. The Red Guards as such kept a low profile during the July Days.

The fiasco in which the July Days ended provided the government with the opportunity for which it had been waiting. It unleashed repression against the far left and took pains to extirpate not only the Council of the Popular Militia, but all the remaining independent workers' militias. The factory committees were compelled to recall all workers serving in such militias and force them to choose between going back to their benches or enrolling in the civil militia for a paltry salary of 150r a month.⁷⁵ The July Days thus spelt the end of the workers' militias, after an adventurous five months' existence.

Factory committees and labour discipline

In view of the image of the factory committees prevalent in the West, which projects them as chaotic, anarchic, elemental organisations, it comes as a surprise, initially, to learn that all factory committees, regardless of their political physiognomy, took the problem of labour discipline extremely seriously. In the aftermath of the February Revolution the abolition of punitive sanctions against labour indiscipline, such as fines, searches, petty tyrannies and exactions, helped precipitate a crisis in labour

74. ibid., p.87.

75. For the Admiralty, Baltic and Putilov works see Fab. zav. kom., pp. 144, 284, 458-9.

discipline which was limited in scope in the spring of 1917, but which grew to chronic proportions by the spring of 1918. This crisis of labour discipline can be measured in several ways, but one striking index of it is the rate of absenteeism. A survey by the Ministry of Trade and Industry showed that the turn-out of workers to work in March 1917 was 6.6% below the January level, and 16.4% below in the metal industry.⁷⁶ At the Vyborg spinning mill men worked an average of 19 days in January 1917 and 18.5 in July; for women the figures were, respectively, 19.6 and 18.1 days.⁷⁷ In January about 10% of the workforce at Putilov were absent for various reasons; by September, this had risen to 25% and by November to 40% of the workforce.⁷⁸ The factory committees had to decide how to deal with this breakdown in discipline.

By democratising factory relations, factory committees tried to create a moral climate in which workers would voluntarily develop a collective self-discipline at work. They issued countless proclamations calling on workers to work conscientiously, many of which were coloured by defencist political sentiments in the spring of 1917. At the New Parviainen works, at Putilov, the Franco-Russian works and the Admiralty works general meetings passed resolutions which condemned negligence at work and large wage demands and called for self-sacrifice in the interests of the revolution.⁷⁹ From the first,

76. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 84, 25 April 1917, p.2.

77. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue III, Pg., 1919, p.24.

78. Rabochaya Gazeta, 154, 7 September 1917, p.4; Gaza, op. cit., p.415.

79. Rabochaya Gazeta, 17, 26 March 1917, p.4; Rabochaya Gazeta, 18, 28 March 1917, p.1.

however, it was clear that ideological inducement and moral suasion could not by themselves ensure that inexperienced workers, suddenly liberated from despotism, would work assiduously. Certain formal sanctions had to be enforced. Many factory committees set up commissions of inquiry (sledstvennye komissii) or committees of internal order (komissii vnutrennogo rasporyadka) to take responsibility for work discipline. These drew up new internal regulations and set penalties for infraction of these. Often such penalties were stiff. At the 1886 Electric Light Company the committee announced on March 16 that "all abuses and individual actions which undermine organisation and disrupt the normal course of work will be punished as follows: such workers will be suspended from work for two weeks and their names will be made known to the workers of Petrograd through the press".⁸⁰ The committee, which had seven Bolshevik, two Menshevik and two SR members, fired a peasant worker on 23 May for absenteeism and drunkenness.⁸¹ At the Nevskaya cotton mill the largely Menshevik committee warned that any worker stopping work before time would be "punished without mercy".⁸² At the Koenig mill a general meeting on 25 May agreed that "in order to reduce absenteeism and carelessness, a worker should receive strict censure for a first offence, one ruble fine for a second (the fine to go to a workers' newspaper) and dismissal for a third offence". After three warnings a woman was sacked for "bad behaviour".⁸³

The factory committees, bastions of skilled, well-paid, experienced, literate workers, frequently came up against opposition from less experienced low-paid workers in their efforts to inculcate

81. LGIA, f. 1477, op. 3, d. 1, l.90.

82. Shishkin, V.F., Velikii oktyabr' i proletarskii moral', M., 1976, pp. 74-5.

83. ibid., pp. 75-6.

labour discipline. When work was resumed at the Pipe Works after the February Revolution, the factory soviet of workers' deputies declared:

According to the declarations of several workshops, production of goods has gone down significantly, so that certain workshops are threatened with total standstill. Many workers will lose their wages and this will cause dissatisfaction and have the most alarming consequences. The council of workers believes that production has declined because many workers, on various pretexts, are avoiding work and ignoring the instructions of foremen and others responsible for output.

The Council declares that it will take every measure against those who neglect their duties, including dismissal. A council of starostas is being set up to watch over the course of work, to resolve questions affecting relations between workers and also relations between workers and management... The council of starostas in each shop will act in full accord with the adminis-tration of the shop, on whom lies full responsibility for output.

A group of anarchist workers promptly reacted to this statement on 13 March:

The council of workers' deputies of the Pipe Works, instead of making definite proposals and raising questions for discussion by a general meeting, delivers orders and threatens us with punishment, including the sack, if we do not carry them out... Formerly, we were slaves of the government and of the bosses, but now there is a new despotic government in the shape of our elected representatives, who, in a touching display of unity with the management, are executing the police task of supervising the conduct and work of the workforce.⁸⁴

From late spring onwards a fall in labour productivity became apparent. This was caused partly by a deterioration of machinery

84. Kommuna, 1, 17 March 1917, p.7.

and materials and partly by a deterioration in the quality of labour power. The latter was due first and foremost to the worsening diet of workers but secondly to a decay in labour discipline. Contemporaries were quick to blame this decay on 'Bolshevism'. The SR commentator, Eroshkin, wrote: "We must not lose sight of the fact that Bolshevism has poisoned the psychology of the workers, that masses of workers have become corrupted by sheer idleness and their productivity has fallen to an incredible degree".⁸⁵ In fact the Bolsheviks were just as concerned as other parties to stem the tide of falling productivity, except that they linked this to the question of workers' control.⁸⁶ As the economic crisis deepened, labour productivity began to plummet and factory committees - regardless of their political complexion - were forced to take action to ensure that workers kept on working.

In May the mainly SR shop stewards' committee at the Franco-Russian works rejected management complaints about a deterioration in labour discipline, but promised that its technical-economic commission would investigate. The latter came to the unwelcome conclusion that "the workers have become undisciplined and do not want to work". In consequence, the stewards agreed by 61 votes, with none against and four abstentions, to recommend a return to piece rates.⁸⁷ At the Putilov works the huge gun shop swung away from the Mensheviks towards the Bolsheviks in mid-June,⁸⁸ but this

85. Eroshkin, M.K., The Soviets in Russia, New York, 1919, p.44.

86. Yu. Larin wrote: 'Whoever talks of the necessity of labour discipline and does not demand workers' control of capitalist enterprises is a hypocrite and a windbag', Rabochii Put', 39, 18 October 1917, p.2.

87. Vestnik Obshchestva Zavodchikov i Fabrikantov, 5, 10 June 1917, p.3.

88. It passed a resolution put to a shop meeting by the Bolshevik orator, Volodarskii, on 14 June. Mitel'man, op. cit., p.101.

did not stop the largely Bolshevik shop committee from taking strict measures to uphold labour intensity. In July a general meeting of the shop condemned certain young workers who were deliberately breaking their machines and the shop committee began to fine and even dismiss workers for slackness or absenteeism.⁸⁹

By September, a crisis of labour discipline extended throughout the Putilov works. A Menshevik worker at the plant reported to the district committee of his party:

There is not even a shadow of discipline in the working masses. Thanks to the replacement of professional guards by soldiers, who are not quite familiar with the rules for letting workers in and out of the factory, thefts have become more frequent recently. The number of instances of workers being drunk is also increasing. But what is most terrible, is the sharp fall in the productivity of labour. Just how low this is is shown, for example, by the fact that formerly 200 gun carriages were produced each month, but now at most there are 50 to 60. The situation is complicated by purely objective factors, the most important of which is the shortage of fuel and materials, and also the fact that many people of doubtful qualifications have entered the workforce. The Putilov works is in debt to the state to the tune of about 200 million rubles and is hurtling towards the abyss. It is already in a catastrophic state.⁹⁰

The Menshevik district committee, after discussion, passed the following resolution:

1) Putting aside all party strife, the conscious workers must develop self-discipline in order to give a shining example to the mass of the workforce; 2) Measures must be taken, even of a repressive character, such as imposing fines, in order to eliminate carelessness and an unserious attitude towards work; 3) The intro-

89. Rabochaya Gazeta, 114, 23 July 1917, p.3; Stepanov, op. cit., pp. 129-30.

90. Rabochaya Gazeta, 174, 30 September 1917, p.3.

duction of piece rates must be sought. This latter measure, although contradicting the party programme, is necessary and for the time being the only radical measure which will raise productivity.⁹¹

Many factory committees proceeded to implement such measures. Fines were reintroduced on a larger scale, mainly for lateness and absenteeism. On 14 September the Executive Committee of the delegate council of the woodworkers' union in Narva district decided that a worker who was absent for more than three days without cause should be fined, and if he repeated it, should be sacked.⁹² The next day a general meeting of workers at the Voronin, Lyutsch and Cheshire cloth print factory agreed to reintroduce periodic searching of workers in view of the alarming increase in stealing.⁹³ On 3 October the workers' organisations at Izhorsk decided that "every order of the foremen, journeymen and senior workers must be unconditionally carried out... In all cases of doubt about the validity of an order, you must immediately inform the shop committee, without any arbitrary opposition or resistance to carrying out the order."⁹⁴ Such evidence of factory committee concern with labour discipline hardly ties in with the picture painted by some Western historians of anarchic organisations busily undermining capitalism. It would be wrong, however, to jump to the opposite conclusion that factory committees were workplace police forces. We shall explore later the complex dialectic between democracy and discipline.

91. ibid.

92. Stepanov, op. cit., pp. 129-30.

93. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 195-6.

94. Stepanov, op. cit., p.130.

Factory committees and the campaign against drunkenness

Heavy drinking was deeply rooted in the popular culture of both the towns and villages of Russia. In the towns most working men spent their few leisure hours drinking. On Vyborg Side around 1905 there were numerous bars and liquor stores, 53 churches, but no workers' club and only one small open-air theatre.⁹⁵ A survey of 1909 revealed that 92% of workers in Petersburg drank alcohol.⁹⁶ In 1908 5.4% of the income of a married male metalworker was spent on drink and tobacco and single male textile workers spent as much as 11% of their income in this way.⁹⁷ Women workers, however, spent hardly anything on alcohol, and married women had to fight hard to prevent their husbands squandering their wages on vodka. Several worker-memoirists recall how wives would stand outside the factory on pay-day in order to catch their husbands before they had a chance to spend their wages at the local bar. Buzinov writes:

Vodka and gambling were the cause of family quarrels. A very real 'class struggle' was waged between men and women around this issue. Every pay-day women would meet their unreliable husbands near the wages-office and 'expropriate' their wage-packets. This operation was accompanied by squabbling on both sides and would sometimes end in a brawl. The sympathy of the workers who watched was invariably on the side of the oppressed husbands, but that did not prevent them making fun of those defeated in battle by the women. Justice demands that one point out the selfless heroism of these women, which revealed itself during the heated skirmishes and desperate screams. Thin, ground-down, as small as ladybirds, or pregnant, these women laid hold of real Goliaths and would not leave the field of battle until they had got at least half the

95. Vyborgskaya Storona, L., 1957, pp. 10-11.

96. Rossiiskii proletariat: oblik, bor'ba, gegemoniya, M., 1970, p.278.

97. Prokopovich, S.N., Byudzhety peterburgskikh rabochikh, Pbg., 1909, p.7; Davidovich, M., Peterburgskii tekstil'nyi rabochii, Pbg., 1912, p.20.

wage.⁹⁸

During the 1905 Revolution women textile workers launched the Popular Campaign against Drunkenness in Nevskii district; this elicited the scorn of male workers at first, but soon factory meetings were passing resolutions against vodka.⁹⁹ This campaign, along with other temperance campaigns by the Church and middle-class organisations, had few lasting effects however.

Although per capita consumption of alcohol was higher in some European countries than in Russia, in the years preceding the First World War (1909-1913) consumption in Russia rose steadily.¹⁰⁰ It was partly in response to this, that the government introduced prohibition in 1914. The ban on liquor had an immediate effect, in that the number of registered cases of alcoholism fell by nearly 40% in 1914 compared to 1913. And in the Moscow region, during the first three months of the ban, absenteeism at work fell by 27%, and by 47% among men. In Petrograd the sale of wine and beer was forbidden in December 1914, and in 1915 there was a drop in the number arrested for being drunk and disorderly. As the war dragged on, however, and as the diet of workers deteriorated severely, so the sale of alcoholic substitutes, particularly methylated spirits, increased.¹⁰¹

98. Buzinov, A., Za Nevskoi zastavoi, M.L., 1930, pp. 25-6; also see Buiko, A.M., Put' rabochego: zapiski starogo bol'shevika, M., 1934, p.11.

99. Buzinov, op. cit., p.73.

100. Binshtok, V.I. and Kaminskii, L.S., Narodnoe pitanie i narodnoe zdorov'ë, M.L., 1929, pp. 45-6.

101. ibid., p.50.

After the February Revolution alcohol became more freely available. In the first heady months of spring, workers' morale was high, real wages were rising and drunkenness does not appear to have been a big social problem. From early summer, however, contemporaries began to warn of a disturbing rise in heavy drinking. In May 1917 the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet warned of a recent wave of drunkenness.¹⁰² At the Okhta explosives works concern was expressed at the scale of drunkenness in the factory, particularly among workers making trotyl.¹⁰³ At the Atlas metal works the committee of starostas claimed that insobriety was rife:

They drink methylated spirits, varnish and all kinds of other substitutes. They come to work drunk, speak at meetings, bawl inappropriate exclamations, prevent their more class-conscious comrades from speaking, paralyse organisational work, and the result is chaos in the workshops. Thanks to alcoholism, class-conscious workers are being suffocated; they don't have the strength to work when every step they take brings them up against some obstacle. But what is more shameful is that some class-conscious, advanced (peredovye) workers are now taking part in this vile activity.¹⁰⁴

Whether there was an objective increase in the scale of drunkenness or simply an increased awareness about the problem is unclear. Certainly all workers' organisations appear to have developed a heightened sensitivity to the problem of working-class intemperance.

In mid-May a plenary session of the Vasilevskii Island district soviet passed the following resolution:

102. Novaya Zhizn', 24, 16 May 1917, p.2.

103. Pravda, 59, 17 May 1917, p.4.

104. Rabochaya Gazeta, 78, 11 June 1917, p.4.

Having discussed the question of how to fight growing alcoholism, it has been decided to oppose it by the following measures:

1. To combat the spread of alcoholism by creating a network of cultural-educational institutions which will strive to raise the intellectual and moral level of the populace.
2. To invite military units and factory committees to bring people in a drunken state before the comrades' court (tovarishcheskii sud), to ostracise them if necessary, and to publish their names, so that everyone may know that they are bringing revolutionary democracy into disrepute by their behaviour.
3. To establish a control organ to combat trade in liquor and drunkenness in public places.
4. To demand that the Petrograd Soviet immediately decree that all those trading in liquor are guilty of criminal activity and are liable to have their property confiscated.
5. Most importantly, to encourage the self-activity of the populace in combatting the terrible evil of alcoholism.¹⁰⁵

On May 23 the Baltic works committee decided that any elected workers' representatives who were found drunk would immediately be relieved of their duties: two promptly were.¹⁰⁶ At the same time the Sestroretsk works committee suspended an adjuster in the box shop for drunkenness, and dismissed two workers in the machine shop for stealing two quarts of methylated spirits from the laboratory.¹⁰⁷ Factory committees elsewhere deprived workers of their wages for being drunk and, in serious cases, dismissed them.¹⁰⁸ On October 10 the Nevskii district council of factory committees proposed high fines for drunkenness and card-playing, the proceeds of which were to go to orphan children.¹⁰⁹ Trade unions also fought against drunkenness. The conflict commission of the metalworkers' union

105. Raionnye Sovety, vol. I, pp. 111-12.

106. Fab. zav. kom., p.241.

107. ibid., pp. 532, 578.

108. For examples at the Admiralty and Baltic works see Fab. zav. kom., pp. 144, 151, 293-4, 401.

cit., p.131.

upheld a decision at the Triangle works to impose fines on workers who appeared drunk at work.¹¹⁰ The Petrograd Council of Trade Unions ratified the sacking of a worker at the Siemens-Halske works for repeated drunkenness.¹¹¹ This tough action by labour organisations cannot have had much effect, however, in view of the orgy of mass drunkenness set off by the October Revolution.

Factory committees and cultural policy

It was axiomatic for all socialists to the right of the Bolsheviks that workers in 1917 did not possess a level of culture adequate to establishing their hegemony throughout society. This was a favourite theme especially of the Menshevik-Internationalist group headed by Maxim Gorkii, which published the daily newspaper Novaya Zhizn'. Gordienko, a moulder at the New Lessner works and treasurer of the Vyborg district soviet, recalled a visit to Gorkii's home in 1917, where he met Sukhanov and Lopata. Gordienko and his workmates began to argue the need for a socialist revolution, at which Lopata pointed out of the window to a group of soldiers sitting on the lawn. "See how they've been eating herrings and have thrown the bones into the flower-bed. It's with people like them that the Bolsheviks want to make a socialist revolution".¹¹² In 1922 Sukhanov reiterated this argument in his Notes on the Revolution. Lenin was incensed by the work, commenting:

110. ibid.

111. ibid.

112. Gordienko, I., Iz boevogo proshlogo, 1914-18gg., M., 1957, p.100.

You say that the creation of socialism demands civilisation. Very well. But why should we not at once create such pre-requisites of civilisation amongst ourselves as the expulsion of the landlords and Russian capitalists and then begin the movement towards socialism? In what books have you read that such alterations of the usual historical order are inadmissible or impossible? Remember that Napoleon wrote: 'On s'engage et puis on voit'.¹¹³

This is precisely the argument which the Bolsheviks put to their critics in 1917; its reiteration by Lenin in 1923, however, was less than ingenuous, for by this time the Bolsheviks had become deeply anxious about the social and political problems posed to the soviet regime by the low cultural level of the workers and peasants. Lenin himself constantly complained of the "semi-asiatic lack of culture, out of which we have not yet pulled ourselves" and "the piles of work which now face us if we are to achieve on the basis of our proletarian gains even a slight improvement of our cultural level".¹¹⁴

The problem of improving the educational and cultural level of the working class was already a central concern for the new labour

113. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, 5th edn., vol. 45, M., 1964, p.381 (see Sukhanov, N.N., The Russian Revolution, London 1955).

114. ibid., p.464. Note Trotsky's comment: 'The Russian worker - except the very top of the class - usually lacks the most elementary habits and notions of culture (in regard to dress, education, punctuality etc.). The West European worker possesses these habits. He has acquired them by a long, slow process under the bourgeois order. This explains why in Western Europe the working class - at any rate its superior elements - is so strongly attached to the bourgeois regime, with its democracy, free capitalist press etc. The belated bourgeois regime in Russia had no time to do any good for the working class and the Russian proletariat broke with the bourgeoisie all the more easily and overthrew the bourgeois regime without regret... History gives us nothing free of cost. Having made a reduction on one point - in politics - it makes us pay the more on another - in culture.' Trotsky, L., Problems of Everyday Life, Pathfinder Press, New York, p.20.

organisations in 1917. The general attitude to education among the leaders of the labour movement was expressed in an appeal by the Putilov works committee which called on Putilovtsy to enrol in evening classes:

Let the idea that knowledge is everything sink deep into our consciousness. It is the essence of life and it alone can make sense of life.¹¹⁵

Some time later the same committee urged:

Questions of culture and enlightenment are now most vital burning questions... Comrades, do not let slip the opportunity of gaining scientific knowledge. Do not waste a single hour fruitlessly. Every hour is dear to us. We need not only to catch up with the classes with whom we are fighting, but to overtake them. That is life's command, that is where its finger is pointing. We are now the masters of our own lives and so we must become masters of all the weapons of knowledge.¹¹⁶

The factory committees were quick to set up 'cultural-enlightenment commissions' in March 1917. The activities of these commissions covered a wide area. At the Admiralty works the commission took charge of the factory club, renovating its premises and arranging a programme of lectures.¹¹⁷ At the Baltic works the education commission sponsored theatrical entertainments; arranged for women workers to be given some teaching by women students from the Bestuzhev courses; gave financial help to the apprentices' club and to a school for

115. Bor'ba klassov, 1924, no. 1-2, p.295.

116. Mitel'man, op. cit., p.213.

117. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 93, 149.

soldiers and sailors; oversaw the running of the factory club and bought portraits of the pioneers of the labour movement in Russia.¹¹⁸

At the Sestroretsk works the commission gave the house and garden of the former director to local children as a kindergarten, re-organised the technical school and forbade apprentices to leave it before they had completed their technical education.¹¹⁹ At the Obukhov and Izhorsk works the education commissions obtained money from the Naval Ministry to enlarge the factory schools.¹²⁰ At Rosenkrantz management gave the workers 10,000 rubles towards the cost of a school and the workers each gave a day's pay towards the setting-up of a club at the factory.¹²¹

One of the areas in which factory committees, trade unions and political parties were most active was in setting up workers' clubs. Such clubs had arisen in Petersburg during the 1905 Revolution and some twenty were in sporadic existence between 1907 and 1914, catering mainly for young single, skilled and reasonably educated men.¹²² During the war most of these clubs closed down. After the February Revolution managements at Phoenix and Erikson works gave large donations towards establishing factory clubs.¹²³ On March 19 workers at Putilov founded a club with a small library and buffet. Soon it had 2,000 members and a management committee, comprising Bolsheviks,

118. ibid., pp. 203, 213, 382-3, 397.

119. ibid., pp. 566, 587, 596.

120. Stepanov, op. cit., p.199.

121. Novaya Zhizn', 206, 20 December 1917, p.4.

122. Levin, I.D., 'Rabochie Kluby v Peterburge 1907-14', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya, M., 1925, vol. 3, p.4.

123. Rabochaya Gazeta, 10, 17 March 1917, p.2.

Mensheviks and SR's. During its first three months of existence, eight lectures were given at the club on themes such as 'The Constituent Assembly and Coming Popular Rule', 'On Socialism', 'On Cooperation', 'The Trade Unions and the War'. Each lecture attracted an average audience of 710 people and some as many as 3,000. The club had a library of 200 books and 475 copies of journals. The club defined its aim as to "unite and develop the working-class public in a socialist spirit, to which end are necessary general knowledge and general development, resting on basic literacy and culture".¹²⁴ On Vasilevskii Island a club named New Dawn was founded in March which soon had 800 members. As well as lectures, the club organised a geographical expedition to Sablino, a steamer excursion to Shlissel'burg for 900 people, a brass band concert and an entertainment for workers at the Pipe Works.¹²⁵ The opening ceremony to inaugurate the Orudiinyi works club consisted of a recital by workers of arias from Mussorgsky operas and a performance by the works band of the Internationale and the Marseillaise. The club housed a library of 4,000 books, a reading room, a small theatre and a school. Evening classes were held in literacy, legal affairs, natural sciences and mathematics.¹²⁶

By the autumn of 1917 there were over 30 clubs in Petrograd, including ones for postalworkers, tram-workers, Polish workers, Latvian workers, an SR club in Rozhdestvenskii district, the New Life

124. Novaya Zhizn', 70, 9 July 1917, p.5.

125. Novaya Zhizn', 76, 16 July 1917, p.5.

126. Novaya Zhizn', 124, 10 September 1917, p.4.

club in Kolpino etc.¹²⁷ Their chief activities consisted of political meetings and lectures, most of which were on political themes. An inter-club committee existed, consisting of representatives from every club and delegates from factory committees and trade unions, which coordinated educational work and provided speakers. Mensheviks were the political party most actively involved in the clubs and appear to have tried to diversify the activities of the clubs away from an exclusive concentration on politics.¹²⁸

Attempts to put on dances, concerts, literary evenings, sporting events, functions for children were attacked in some quarters, however, as a diversion from the major struggle of the day.¹²⁹

Workers' clubs and some factory committees sponsored amateur dramatic societies among the workers of Petersburg prior to the war. Workers' clubs staged plays by Ostrovskii, Tolstoy, Gogol', Hauptmann and lesser-known playwrights. Workers liked realistic plays about everyday life, with which they could identify directly. They disliked religious or didactic plays, plays about peasant life, fantasy or foreign plays.¹³⁰ After the February Revolution working-class theatre took on a new lease of life. At Putilov the works committee took over the factory theatre, formerly in the charge of the administration.¹³¹ At the Nobel works a workers' socialist theatre group was set up in July, which enunciated its aim thus:

127. Novaya Zhizn', 25, 17 May 1917, p.5; Novaya Zhizn', 108, 20 August 1917, p.5.

128. Golos Rabotnitsy, 4, 29 May 1917, pp. 4, 7; Golos Rabotnitsy, 7, 1 July 1917, pp. 6-7.

129. See the debate at the conference of proletarian educational organisations, 16-19 October 1917, Novaya Zhizn', 157, 19 October 1917, p.4.

130. See the survey of working-class taste in Kleinbort, L.M., Ocherki rabocheho intelligentsii : teatr, zhivopis' muzika, vol. 2, Pg., 1923, pp. 14, 42.

We exist not to amuse (razvlechenie) but to foster spiritual growth, to enrich consciousness...to unite individual personalities into one gigantic class personality. All that does not serve the development of Humanity is vain and empty. We want theatre to become life, so that in time life will become theatre.¹³²

In Sestroretsk local workers staged Hamlet, Shaw's 'Candide' and a play by Maeterlinck. Larissa Reisner, later famous for her exploits in the Red Army, lived in Sestroretsk at the time and complained about the number of crude, tendentious 'class' plays which were staged at the local theatre. She also disliked the sentimentalism of the productions - the tendency to play on emotion rather than reason.¹³³

Other artistic activities organised in the factories included classes in painting and drawing, and poetry readings by the accomplished worker-poet, Ivan Loginov, at the New Parviainen works. At the Metal Works there was a wind band, a string orchestra and a band of folk instruments conducted by a draughtsman.¹³⁴ Factory committees sponsored lectures on the arts, the most famous of which were those by the Bolshevik Lunacharsky.¹³⁵ Not all Bolsheviks however seem to have taken the arts as seriously as the future Commissar of Enlightenment. Asked by the gun shop at Putilov to send a speaker on 'Art and the Proletariat', the Petersburg Committee

132. Novaya Zhizn', 82, 23 July 1917, p.5.

133. Novaya Zhizn', 76, 17 July 1917, p.5; Novaya Zhizn', 106, 20 August 1917, p.5.

134. Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev, vol. II, M., 1971, p.45; Sergeev, op. cit., vol. I, p.338.

135. In August and September Lunacharskii gave a series of lectures on the culture of the Athens, Florence, Ghent and Paris Communes.

of the Bolsheviks sent someone who clearly knew nothing at all about art, but who managed, rather ingeniously, to launch into a speech on The 'Art' of Insurrection, which resulted in the meeting passing a resolution in support of a soviet government.¹³⁶

Organising social and artistic activities came second for most factory committees and trade unions to the more basic work of eradicating illiteracy. One of the most ambitious attempts to teach workers to read and write - one which anticipated the likbez campaigns of the 1920's - took place on Vyborg Side. After the Bolsheviks won a majority in the Vyborg district дума in June, N. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife, took on the job of combating illiteracy. An Educational Council was set up on which there were representatives from all factories in the district. Krupskaya recalls:

When the question came up of the need for introducing general literacy, the workers in all the factories quickly registered all the illiterates. The employers were asked to provide rooms in the factory for classes instructing the illiterate. When one of them refused, the women workers raised an awful row and exposed the fact that one of the rooms was being occupied by shock troops. Finally, the employer had to rent premises outside the factory for the school. A committee of workers was set up to supervise the attendance of the classes and the work of the teachers.¹³⁷

O.A. Stetskaya taught in the literacy class at the Rosenkrantz works in a brand new classroom built by the factory-owners at a cost of 100,000 rubles. At first, 25 workers enrolled to be taught to read

136. Novaya Zhizn', 106, 20 August 1917, p.5; Mitel'man, op. cit., pp. 161-2.

137. Krupskaya, N., Memories of Lenin, London: Panther, 1970, p.307.

and write, but later the number rose to 60. She taught the workers to read by writing Bolshevik slogans on the blackboard in large letters.¹³⁸

Such politicisation of work in education was characteristic of the time. On July 19 representatives from 120 factory committees met members of the agitation collective of the Petrograd Soviet to discuss educational work. A Menshevik member of the collective, Dement'ev, criticised political meetings as a means of education, arguing that they merely served to inflame the passions of workers. Factory committee representatives were furious at this, and the resolution passed by the meeting stated, specifically, that "the cultural enlightenment activity of the factory committees must be revolutionary-socialist and must be directed towards developing the class-consciousness of the proletariat".¹³⁹ The meeting agreed to call a conference of all proletarian educational and cultural organisations, which took place on October 16-19.¹⁴⁰

The range of activities undertaken by the factory committees in the sphere of culture and education is impressive, but it must be put into perspective. Although the labour leaders were very aware of the crucial importance of work in this area, achievement constantly lagged behind aspiration. In practice, work in education tended to come low on a list of priorities, top of which was the simple need to keep everyone fed. Of the unions only the leather-

138. Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev, vol. I, M., 1967, p.151.

139. Borshchenko, I., ed., Profsoyuzy SSSR, vol. I, M. 1963, p.425.

140. The proceedings of this conference are fascinating and foreshadow the debates within Narkompros and Proletkult. Lunacharskii, Gorkii, Osip Brik and many others took part in discussions about art, education and proletarian culture. The fullest proceedings of this conference are only available in German. See Gorsen, P. and Knödler-Bunte, E., Proletkult: System einer proletarischen Kultur, Band I, Dokumentation, Stuttgart, 1974.

workers' union put a significant amount of time and energy into such work.¹⁴¹ Other unions, such as printers' union, did almost nothing.¹⁴² The factory committees were more effective than the unions, on the whole, but their work was less satisfactorily organised than it might have been, since they often competed with one another in the same area and worked less satisfactorily than they might have, had they been more coordinated. Finally, cultural work tended, as the economic situation deteriorated, to take second place to other, more pressing claims on the attention of the committees.

Factory committees and the organisation of food supply

Before 1914 grain exports from Russia averaged between 9.8 million tonnes and 12.3 million tonnes per annum.¹⁴³ The ending of grain exports in 1914 ought to have improved the domestic grain supply, but war in fact worsened it. The area under seed shrank because peasants no longer found it profitable to market their grain - there being few manufactured goods to buy with profits. Moreover distribution of such grain as was marketed was hampered by growing disruption of the transport system.¹⁴⁴ In Petrograd grain shortages

141. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 195, 8 September 1917, p.2. The leatherworkers' union organised lectures for young people, special courses for women, adult education classes, social evenings and a special evening devoted to Lermontov. Golos Kozhevnik, 1, p.19 and ibid., no. 2-3, p.14.
142. Tikhanov, A., 'Rabochie-pechatniki v 1917g.', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, M., 1925, 4, p.18.
143. Lyashchenko, P.I., History of the National Economy of Russia, New York: Macmillan, 1949, p.767.
144. Keep, J.H.L., The Russian Revolution: a study in mass mobilisation, London: Weidenfeld, 1976, ch. 3.

became particularly acute in the autumn of 1916. Delivery of wheat and rye flour to the capital was down to 91% of the monthly average in November 1916 and 48% in December.¹⁴⁵ In the spring of 1917 grain supplies improved somewhat, after the Provisional Government established a grain monopoly and set up food committees in the localities to organise supplies. Even so, by the beginning of May procurements of grain nationally were meeting only 58% of the army's needs and 41% of civilian needs.¹⁴⁶ In Petrograd grain deliveries on the Marinskii canal system in the first half of 1917 were down by 41,000 tonnes compared to the first half of 1916.¹⁴⁷ By July the food situation in the capital was grave. On 2 July the Ministry of Food reported that there was enough grain in the capital to last twenty days and that buckwheat would not last until August.¹⁴⁸ By the beginning of August there was only two days' bread supply left, but the situation improved as the harvest was brought in and deliveries for September were adequate. However, the harvest was not a particularly good one and attempts by the government to induce peasants to market more grain by doubling fixed grain prices had only a limited effect. By the beginning of October grain supplies were lower than ever, with only three to four days' supply left in the capital. Meat stocks were depleted and livestock was dying off owing to lack of animal feeds. Sugar, milk and most other staple commodities were in dangerously short supply. To make matters worse, chaos on the

145. Lyashchenko, op. cit., p.767.

146. Selitskii, op. cit., p.22.

147. Adibek-Melikyan, E.A., Revolutsionnaya situatsiya v Rossii nakanune Oktyabrya, Erevan, 1967, p.156.

148. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 140, 4 July 1917, p.3.

transport system was aggravating the food shortages. On 14 October there was only $3\frac{1}{2}$ days' supply of grain left in the capital, yet 13,000 tonnes were stranded on the railways and canals outside the city limits. The food in 1200 wagons at the Nikolaevsk railway depot had to be thrown away after it went rotten while waiting to be unloaded.¹⁴⁹

For most working-class families the crisis in food supplies spelt hunger and the growing prospect of starvation. Even prior to the war, the diet of most working people had been grossly inadequate. Bread was the staple food, supplemented by Kasha a few herrings or milk products, cabbage soup and occasionally sausage (kolbasa, or 'dog's delight', as it was known in Moscow). Meat and milk were bought only on special occasions.¹⁵⁰ In 1916, according to data collected by Dr. Gordon, the average worker in Petrograd ate between 800 and 1200 grams of bread each day, 400 grams of potatoes or 200 grams of Kasha, a little milk, a few onions and no meat.¹⁵¹ In February 1917 citizens of the capital were rationed to 500 grams of bread per day and in summer rationing was extended to a kilo of sugar per month, 200 grams of buckwheat per month, 600 grams of fats per month, 800 grams of meat per month and 20 eggs per month.¹⁵² The problem was that there was not enough food in the capital to meet these rations. According to official ration estimates, some 4,000 tonnes of meat were required each week in Petrograd, but in the month

149. Stepanov, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

150. Davidovich, op. cit., pp. 17-19. The poorer textileworkers' families in this survey could not afford enough of even these items.

151. Anskii, A., ed., Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g., L., 1928, p.15 (henceforward, Prof. Dvizh.).

152. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy Ekonomiki Truda, M., 1964, p.350.

of May only 885 tonnes were delivered. By October the bread ration had been reduced to 300 grams per day and a further reduction to 200 grams was imminent. These rations represented only what people were allowed to buy at official prices, but many could simply no longer afford to buy food, even at fixed prices. Buying food on the market was simply out of the question, since food prices had soared off into the stratosphere. People were thus competing for an ever-diminishing stock of food, the price of which was rising ever higher. Queues were to be seen everywhere. The Ministry of Internal Affairs noted that queues "have in fact turned the eight-hour working day into a 12 or 13-hour day, because working-class women and men go straight from the factory or workplace to stand in queues for four or five hours".¹⁵³ The inevitable result was that workers were eating far less. Nationally, Strumilin estimated that the calorie intake of workers was down by 22% on the 1913 level, but in Petrograd things were much worse. Binshtok estimated that a worker doing medium to hard work needed more than 3,000 calories a day and that in Petrograd in the summer of 1917 such a worker consumed about half of this amount.¹⁵⁴

A host of different popular organisations threw themselves into the grim business of staving off hunger. Most important were the democratically-elected central and district food boards, which dealt mainly with rationed products. Cooperative societies were also heavily involved in securing and distributing food. Between May and July the Union of Workers' Cooperatives distributed over 1,600 tonnes

153. Stepanov, op. cit., p.67.

154. Binshtok and Kaminskii, op. cit., pp. 31, 54; Usloviya byta rabochikh v dorevolutsionnoi Rossii, M., 1958, p.14; Kabo, E., Pitanie russkogo rabochego do i posle voiny, M., 1926, p.69.

of vegetables and 10-15 wagonloads of Estonian milk, as well as butter and cheese.¹⁵⁵ In addition, district soviets took an active part in food distribution. On Vyborg Side the soviet attempted to organise the population into house committees and distribute produce through them, in an effort to eliminate queuing.¹⁵⁶ The Peterhof district soviet donated 10,000r. towards organising workers' canteens and imposed strict control of local bakeries.¹⁵⁷

Factory committees and trade unions worked in liaison with the cooperatives and soviets. The factory committees took over the running of factory shops and of works' canteens. At the Okhta explosives works the committee set up a works canteen to serve 2,500 cheap meals each day; it also ran two shops and a bakery, looked after 80 pigs and a fish pond and grew potatoes.¹⁵⁸ At the Cable works the food commission of the works committee ran a canteen which produced 1,200 dinners a day.¹⁵⁹ At the Pipe Works no fewer than 110 workers were actively involved in procuring and distributing food. In months of particularly acute food shortage, such as May, July and October, some factory committees attempted to buy food independently. The Izhorsk works committee bought fish and potatoes from local peasants and the Putilov works committee sent 39 workers into the countryside to try to purchase food.¹⁶¹ At the Putilov works tension

155. Trud, 2-3, September 1917, p.29.

156. Stepanov, op. cit., p.70.

157. ibid., p.69.

158. Rabochii Kontrol', p.106.

159. Stepanov, op. cit., p.68.

160. Loginova, S.E., 'Partiya bol'shevikov-organizator revolyutsionnogo tvorchestva mass v reshenii prodovol'stvennoi problemy v period podgotovki oktyabrya', Uchenye zapiski Len. un-t. seriya ist. nauk., vol. 31, 1959, p.77.

161. Stepanov, op. cit., p.68.

was particularly high. When meat suddenly appeared in local restaurants in the Peterhof district, at a time when there was a complete dearth of meat elsewhere, starving workers from Putilov attacked members of the district cooperative society and sacked food shops. Only prompt action by the works committee and district soviet prevented the spread of disturbances.¹⁶²

Such initiatives by grass-roots organisations were utterly puny compared to the colossal scale of the food crisis, which simply got worse through the winter of 1917-18 until mass starvation drove hundreds and thousands out of the capital. Nevertheless one day's dinner meant a great deal to a hungry worker and the fact that the factory committees did all in their power to provide such meals, immeasurably enhanced their prestige in the working class.

The political character of the factory committees

The preceding review of six areas of factory committee activity gives an insight into the essentially local, practical character of most factory committee business, oriented as it was towards day-to-day issues such as labour discipline, control of hiring and firing, education, food and law and order. An examination of the records of factory committee meetings reveals that they only rarely busied themselves with matters not directly concerned with the workplace, although occasionally they might discuss major political events, such as the June 18 demonstration organised by the Soviet, the July Days or the Kornilov rebellion. Yet it would be wrong to infer from this that the committees were apolitical or not active politically.

162. Raionnye Sovety, vol. 3, p.264; Pankratova, A., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v revolyutsii 1917g., M.L., 1927, p.38.

If they did not discuss politics at their meetings it was because they considered that the general meeting of the whole workforce was the proper forum for such discussion. General meetings were the sovereign bodies in the factory and the committees contented themselves with organising such meetings, where the general will could be expressed in a political resolution. If the committees therefore abstained from political discussion amongst themselves, it did not prevent them from taking a thoroughly political approach to all the problems which faced them - even the most commonplace, as the preceding review showed. Factory committees were intrinsically political bodies, not least because they were generally elected on a party political basis and because they were the first working-class institutions to hoist the Bolshevik colours to their mast. Whilst it is not the purpose of the present work to examine the political development of the working class, a brief survey of the political development of the factory committees at grass roots cannot be forborne, if one is to set their general activities in context and to disclose how the factory committees, as the democratic representatives of the workers in each enterprise, changed their political coloration in response to the changing political affiliations of those whom they represented.

In the early stage, the members of the factory committees tended not to be elected on a party-political franchise. In the textile industry most factory committee members belonged to no political party. At the Pal', Leont'ev and Northern-weaving mills almost all factory committee members were non-party.¹⁶³ At the First Spinning

163. Perazich, V., Tekstili Leningrada v 1917g., L., 1927, pp. 28-9.

Mill the chairman of the committee was a right-wing SR, but apart from one Menshevik woman and a Menshevik joiner, the rest were non-party.¹⁶⁴ At Kozhevnikov weaving mill the chairman of the committee was a Bolshevik, but the five women and two male scutchers who made up the rest of the committee belonged to no political party.¹⁶⁵ In the metalworking industries political parties were more entrenched. Here Mensheviks and SR's tended to dominate the factory committees, just as they dominated the soviets, in the spring of 1917. At the Pipe Works almost all the 40 shop stewards were members of the SR party, although there were two or three Bolsheviks.¹⁶⁶ At the Obukhov works only five of the 32 members of the committee were Bolsheviks, the rest were SR's or Mensheviks.¹⁶⁷ At the Nevskii shipyard, elections in early April put three Mensheviks, three SR's and one Bolshevik on the committee.¹⁶⁸ In the Central Workshops of the North-Western Railway, Mensheviks and SR's dominated the workers' Executive Committee although its chairman was a Bolshevik.¹⁶⁹ At the Langenzippen works SR's and Mensheviks controlled the committee.¹⁷⁰ Even in factories where Bolsheviks were soon to become extremely powerful the moderate socialists tended to dominate the committees. Thus at the radical Aivaz, Nobel and New Lessner works the first committees comprised mainly of Mensheviks and SR's.¹⁷¹ At the New Parviainen works

164. Leningradskie tekstilya, 1927, 6-7, p.9.

165. Perazich, op. cit., p.28.

166. Prof. Dvizh., p.271.

167. Petrogradskie bol'sheviki v oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, L., 1957, pp. 44-5.

168. Payalin, N.P., Zavod im. Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1933, p.346.

169. Petrogradskie bol'sheviki v oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, p.55.

170. Tomkevich, I.G., Znamya oktyabrya, L., 1972, p.33.

171. Petrogradskie bol'sheviki v oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii, p.55.

Bolsheviks were somewhat better represented, comprising three members of the committee, against three non-party members and one Menshevik. Factories where Bolsheviks had a majority from the first were few. At the Phoenix works the Bolsheviks were the largest political grouping, and at the 1886 Electrical Light Company on April 17 Bolsheviks won 673 votes and 7 places on the committee; Mensheviks and SR's in a joint slate won 406 votes and 4 places.¹⁷²

In other industries the political make-up of factory committees in the spring of 1917 was similar. At the Skorokhod shoe factory most of the 40 committee members belonged to no political party; only one woman was a Bolshevik.¹⁷³ At the Triangle rubber works SR's comprised a majority of the 16 members of the committee in March and April; the Bolsheviks had two members on the committee.¹⁷⁴

The predominance of Mensheviks and SR's on the committees reflects the prevailing sentiments in the working class at the time, summed up by Lenin as 'revolutionary defensism', i.e. enthusiasm for the February Revolution and a willingness to defend it against its enemies--be they foreign or indigenous. The moderate socialists best responded to this mood. However the election of members of particular political parties was not, at this time, necessarily evidence of support for the policies of the parties which they represented. Many members of the factory committees were elected because of their record as shopfloor leaders; individual reputation

172. Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev, vol. I, pp. 131-2; Okt. rev. i Fab., vol. I, p.56.

173. Istoriya Len. gos. obuvnoi fabriki, Skorokhod, L., 1969, p.134.

174. Shabalin, B., Krasnyi Treugol'nik, 1860-1935, L., 1938, p.158.

was more important at this time than political affiliation. The fact that more Mensheviks and SR's were elected to the committees than Bolsheviks may simply reflect the fact that they were numerous in March, since the Bolsheviks had lost more members than they as the result of wartime repression. Conversely, the fact that Bolsheviks such as V.Ya. Chubar', I.I. Lepse, A.K. Skorokhodov, N.I. Derbyshev, A.E. Vasil'ev, Ya. A. Kalinin, V.N. Kozitskii were made chairmen¹⁷⁵ of their factory committees is more a reflection of their individual prestige than of support for Bolshevik policies within the workforce. The Putilov works is a good example in this connection. For the giant plant did not swing decisively to the Bolshevik party until after the July Days, yet from April the works committee consisted of 12 Bolsheviks, 7 non-party, 2 SR's and one anarchist.¹⁷⁶

The factory committees were the first working class organisation to fall under the influence of the Bolshevik party. Already when the first conference of factories' committees took place at the end of May (see chapter 7) 82% of the votes went to a resolution on workers' control drafted by Lenin and introduced by Zinoviev.¹⁷⁷ Bolsheviks may have been over-represented at the conference in relation to their numbers on the factory committees. At the Nevskii shipyard, for example, Bolsheviks were outnumbered six to one on the committee, yet the committee sent two Bolsheviks and one SR to the conference, either because of their greater personal kudos or their greater political acumen.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless many of those who voted for

175. They were chairmen, in respective order, of factory committees at the Orudiinyi, Langenzippen, Duflon, Soikin, Putilov, Skorokhod and Siemens-Halske works.

176. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, p.85.

177. This resolution got 297 votes, with 21 against and 44 abstentions. Pravda, 74, 4 June 1917.

178. Payalin, op. cit., p.386.

the Bolshevik resolution were almost certainly not members of the party and may very well have been members of moderate socialist parties. For the fact is that, at factory level, many Mensheviks and SR's were far more radical in their practice than the official line of their parties permitted. At the Orudiinyi works, the committee, chaired by the Bolshevik Chubar', consisted mainly of Mensheviks and SR's. It implemented radical forms of workers' control from early spring, yet as late as July a general meeting expressed confidence in the Kerensky government. Those moderate socialists who implemented radical measures of control at Orudiinyi were simply responding to a situation which seemed to call for radical measures.¹⁷⁹ At factory level Bolshevik talk of workers' control made far more sense to them than their own parties' talk of state control of the economy.

Being the institutions closest to the mass of workers, the factory committees were the first to respond to the shift to the left which occurred in popular political attitudes. Those moderate socialists on the factory committees who refused to swing into line with their constituents were soon removed. From the early summer the number of Bolsheviks on the factory committees began to increase. In June at the Langenzippen works Bolsheviks won a majority of places on the committee after new elections.¹⁸⁰ After the failure of the June offensive on the Eastern Front and the repression which ensued from the July Days, the process of 'Bolshevisation' accelerated. At the Skorokhod works Bolsheviks swept the board in new factory committee elections at the end of July, winning 64 places

179. Selitskii, op. cit., p.38; Rabochii kontrol', pp. 124-5; Rabochaya Gazeta, 54, 12 May 1917, p.4; Rabochii Put', 14, 19 September 1917, p.4.

180. Izvestiya raionnogo komiteta Petrogradskoi Storony, 1, July 1917, p.3.

against ten to the SR's and five to the anarchists.¹⁸¹ At the Sestroretsk arms works on August 1 Bolsheviks won eight places on the committee, SR's five and Mensheviks two.¹⁸² At the Parviainen works the Bolsheviks got 1,800 votes against the SR's 300 votes in new factory committee elections.¹⁸³ In the wake of the Komilov rebellion at the end of August the tempo of Bolshevik success quickened. At the Lessner works Bolsheviks gained 471 votes, non-party candidates 186, SR's 155 and Mensheviks a mere 23 votes.¹⁸⁴ At the Dynamo works the Bolsheviks received one-and-a-half times as many votes as the SR's in new factory committee elections.¹⁸⁵ At the Mint, new elections to the committee produced five Bolsheviks, three members of no political party and one SR.¹⁸⁶ The complete collapse of moderate socialism in the face of a rising tide of popular Bolshevism is nowhere more evident than at the Pipe Works. This was for long a bastion of the SR's. At the beginning of June new elections were held for the factory committee and district soviet, in which the SR's gained 8,852 votes (56% of the vote), the Bolsheviks and Internationalists 5,823 votes (36%) and the Menshevik Defencists 1,061 votes (7%). As a result, the SR's got 21 places on the committee, the Internationalists 14 places and the Defencists 2 places.¹⁸⁷ On October 13 the workers succeeded in getting new elections once again.

181. Istoriya...Fabriki, Skorokhod, p.172.

182. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 573-4.

183. Rabochii, 6, 29 August 1917, p.4.

184. Rabochii Put', 22, 28 September 1917, p.4.

185. Rabochii Put', 20, 26 September 1917, p.4.

186. Freidlin, op. cit., p.158

187. Pravda, 79, 11 June 1917, p.4.

This time the Bolsheviks gained 9,388 votes (62% of the vote), the SR's 3,822 (25%), anarchists 640 votes (4%) and Mensheviks 552 (3.7%). As a result, the Bolsheviks gained 23 places on the factory committee, the SR's 16, the anarchists two and the Mensheviks one.¹⁸⁸

By October the Bolsheviks were by far the largest political grouping in the factory committees. In some large factories such as the above-mentioned Pipe Works, or the Obukhov and Izhorsk works, which had been strongholds of moderate socialism, the Bolsheviks had won paramountcy very recently and did not always enjoy an absolute majority vis-a-vis other parties. Nevertheless in the vast majority of firms in the metal industry they were completely triumphant. Only a handful of factories had failed to register Bolshevization to some significant extent.¹⁸⁹

188. Oktyabr'skoe Vooruzhennoe Vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, p.118.

189. Typical of the politically conservative factories were two textile mills in the bourgeois Aleksandro-Nevskii district of central Petrograd. At the Pal' factory the committee consisted of 12 non-party people, 4 SR's, one Bolshevik and one Menshevik in October. And at the Maxwell cotton mill the committee comprised five non-party, four SR's and three Bolsheviks at this time. Perazich, op. cit., p. 92.

5.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRADE UNIONS

Trade unionism in Russia was a very different phenomenon from trade unionism in Western Europe. In the West, the organised labour movement was far more powerful than in Russia - in terms of membership, organisational resources, industrial muscle and political punch. Yet the by-product of the growth in strength of the labour movement had been the emergence of a bureaucratic labour leadership which, to some extent, stood as an obstacle to working-class militancy. As early as 1911, Michels had analysed the apparently inexorable tendency for a conservative oligarchy to emerge in both socialist parties and trade unions as a function of increasing size and organisational complexity, but it was only with the outbreak of war that the full implications of this development were revealed.¹ In return for the high accolade of government recognition, trade unions in Britain and Germany abandoned any pretensions to socialism and agreed to support their government's policy of Burgfriede, or civil peace, by subordinating the interests of the working class to the higher interests of the Union Sacrée. In Russia the unions were suppressed during the war. In March 1917 labour leaders faced the task of constructing a labour movement from scratch. Yet by an irony of history this 'disadvantage' proved to be a great advantage as far as socialism was concerned. For the absence of an entrenched labour bureaucracy enormously facilitated the development of a revolutionary socialist labour movement in Russia, whereas in Germany and Italy when semi-revolutionary situations emerged in 1918-19 and 1919-20, the trade

1. Michels, R., Political Parties, New York: Macmillan, Free Press, 1968.

union and socialist leaders proved constitutionally incapable of leading the insurrectionary popular movements and played instead a crucial role in restabilising the bourgeois order.

In February 1917 eleven unions maintained a shadowy existence in the Petrograd underground: they were tiny, illegal and much subject to the depredations of the police. A further three unions - of printing employees, pharmacy employees and shop assistants - existed legally, but were as tiny as the illegal unions and almost as ineffective.² After the February Revolution trade unions quickly re-established themselves. In the first two weeks of March alone about thirty were refounded. Militants who had been active in the earlier periods of union construction of 1905-8 and 1912-14 called meetings of workers in different industries, which were advertised in the socialist press, in order to re-form the unions. On 11 March a thousand textileworkers assembled to elect 20 members (half of them women) to a new board to take on the task of reconstructing the union.³ The next day nearly 2,000 metalworkers met to elect an organisation commission, to which mainly Mensheviks were elected. Until mid-April, however, when a Central Board was established, the metalworkers' union existed only as a congeries of local groups.⁴ On 5 March bakers met to elect six deputies to the Soviet (three Bolsheviks, two SR Maximalists and one Menshevik) and they revived their union at the same time. Workers in small enterprises had to get together in order to form a large enough group to elect a deputy to the soviet. In meeting together for this purpose, they usually used the occasion to

2. Leiberov, I.P., Na shturm samoderzhaviya, M., 1979, p.61.

3. Pravda, 12, 18 March 1917, p.4; Tkach, 1, November 1917, p.28.

4. Pravda, 9, 15 March 1917, p.4; Lepse, I., 'Piterskie metallisty v oktyabre 1917g.', Metallist, 1922, 12, p.63.

resuscitate a trade union. This was one reason why the first unions to get off the ground were those in small workshop industries, such as tailoring, hairdressing, gold-, silver- and bronze-smithery and joinery.⁵ In the larger factory industries factory committees initially promoted workers' interests and it was thus a couple of months before the larger, industrial unions began to function properly.

The metalworkers' union was particularly slow to get off the ground. It did not function on a city-wide basis until the middle of April. Prior to this, metalworkers' unions functioned at district level. The Bolsheviks organised a union in Narva district, which had 11,000 members by the end of April, and all but one of the district board were Bolsheviks. Mensheviks set up the Vyborg district union, which by the end of April had 5,000 members, and they were balanced equally with the Bolsheviks on the district board. Mensheviks dominated the Moscow district union, which had 7,500 members, and SR's dominated the Nevskii district board. Bolsheviks were instrumental in organising unions in Petrograd district, the First and Second City districts, Kolpino and Sestroretsk. By the time the different districts amalgamated into a city union they had 50,000 members.⁶ On 7 May 535 delegates from the districts met to elect a city board of the metalworkers' union. This meeting resolved that the union should be an industrial union embracing all workers in the metal industry regardless of their job.

5. Shlyapnikov, A., Semnadtsatyi God, vol. II, M.L., 1925, p.133.

6. Anskii, A., ed., Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g., L., 1929, p.119 (henceforward Prof. Dvizh.); Rabochaya Gazeta, 42, 28 April 1917, p.4.

From the beginning of May 1917 the major unions of the factory workers in Petrograd grew spectacularly. According to figures published in 1928, which are almost certainly exaggerated,⁷ the membership of the major factory-based unions in Petrograd was as follows:-

<u>Union</u>	<u>Membership on 1 July 1917</u>	<u>Membership on 1 October 1917</u>
Metalworkers	82,000	190,000 (140,000)
Textileworkers	28,000	32,000 (32,658)
Printers	-	25,328 (25,000)
Paperworkers	-	6,400 (5,200)
Cardboardmakers	-	2,000 (3,100)
Woodworkers	15,000	20,500 (20,500)
Leatherworkers	15,750	16,708 (16,708)
Foodworkers	-	13,000 (13,250)
Tobaccoworkers	-	14,000 (14,000)
Chemicalworkers	-	- (17,200)

Source: Anskii, A., ed. Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g., L., 1928, pp. 341-3. The figures in brackets in column three are the official trade union figures for Petrograd membership on 1 October 1917. See Delo Naroda, 174, 7 October 1917, p.4 and Professional'nyi Vestnik, 314, 15 October 1917, p.21. I have not used the table in Stepanov, op. cit., p.50, as his figures seem to be too high.

By October there was a total trade union membership of about 390,000 in Petrograd, including non-factory workers such as shop workers,

7. The number of members in the metal, leather and wood unions exceeds the total number of workers in the respective industries. This may partly be due to the fact that these unions included workers in the province of Petrograd, and not just city, but it seems more likely to be due to the fact that the figures represent not current membership in October and July, but the number of enrollments since March, i.e. they make no allowance for drop-outs. Compare V. Ya. Grunt's analysis of the figures for trade union membership in Moscow in Istoriya SSSR, 1965, 1, p.232.

catering workers, postal and railroad workers. Throughout Russia as a whole there were about 2 million trade union members - about 10% of wage-earners of all kinds.⁸

The unions appear to have had no difficulty in recruiting members; indeed in some industries there appears to have been close to 100% membership. Data on payment of subscriptions suggest that the drop-out rate was not very high. In the metalworkers' union monthly subscriptions were 80k. for the low-paid; 1r.40k. for the middle wage group and 2r. for the highly-paid.⁹ Monthly subscriptions to the union totalled 94,335r. in June and 133,540r. in July. In the textile union monthly subscriptions rose from 4,800r. to 10,000r. between May and July, but in the same period subscriptions to the leatherworkers' union fell from 18,093r. to 15,167r.¹⁰ In September the glassworkers' union reported that "subscriptions are being paid promptly".¹¹ This suggests that the membership was paying its dues but tells us very little about their actual involvement in union affairs. This problem shall be examined further in chapter 9.

Craft unionism

In Europe and America craft unions proved to be the natural form of organisation in the early phase of the labour movement. Craft unions, such as the A.F.L. in America or the 'model' unions in Britain,

8. Such a level of unionisation - achieved in less than six months - did not compare badly with the levels in the West. In 1912 about 20% of the total occupied labour force in Britain were members of trade unions; in Germany about 25%; in the USA and Italy about 11% and in France only 8%. Kir'yanov, Yu. I., 'Ob oblike rabochego Klassa Rossii', in Rossiiskii proletariat - oblik, bor'ba, gegemoniya, M., 1970, p.130.

9. Metallist, 1-2, 17 August 1917, p.19.

10. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 2, 19 October 1917, p.11. None of these figures include enrollment subscriptions.

11. Proletarskii Prizyv, 4, 20 September 1917, p.4.

proved far stronger than more broad-based unions such as the Knights of Labor in America or the General National and Consolidated Trade Union in Britain. The result was, however, that by the twentieth century union members in the West were fragmented into myriad small, competing unions.¹²

After the February Revolution Russian workers began by building local and craft unions. In the metal and allied trades over twenty such unions appeared in March - but few lasted for very long.¹³ Many of them were based on workers in small enterprises. At the beginning of March an appeal was launched to metalworkers in workshops and factories of less than 500 workers in the Moscow district of the capital to meet to elect deputies to the soviet and to form a union:

You comrade artisans (¹remeskniki) are the stepsons of the proletarian family; because of your lack of organisation, and a whole number of other factors, capital oppresses you far more than the proletarians in the large factories.¹⁴

A meeting of blacksmiths from small forges met around the same time to elect a deputy to the soviet and to form a union. They passed a Menshevik resolution which welcomed the soviet and called on it to strictly control the actions of the Provisional Government. These unions, together with unions of foundry-workers and machinists, were very quickly absorbed into the metalworkers' union. Other craft unions

12. In 1913 in Britain there were 1,269 different trade unions with a membership of 4,135,000, and in Germany in the same year there were 49 Free Unions, with a membership of 2,574,000, 23 Hirsch-Duncker unions, with a membership of 107,000, and 25 Christian unions, with a membership of 343,000. International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, see under Trade Unions.

13. Metallist, 1922, 12, p.66.

14. Pravda, 7, 12 March 1917, p.3.

resisted absorption into the metalworkers' union however. In April stokers from the Metal Works, Rozenkrantz and Phoenix formed a union, on the grounds that "we are weaker than other masterovye, despite doing one of the most severe, strenuous and responsible jobs".¹⁵ On 18 September a meeting was held to discuss merger with the metalworkers' union, but this proved abortive since the stokers' union would not accept the metalworkers' collective contract. It informed the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions that:

The metalworkers' union mistakenly stands for a narrow production principle, which the Society of Factory and Works Owners exploits in order to weaken the organisational work of Petrograd trade unions.¹⁶

The stokers argued that theirs was a growing profession, that many of their members were outside manufacturing industry and that to join the metalworkers' union, where there was no independence for each craft, would be "suicide". It did not fuse until January 1918.¹⁷

On 30 April a union of welders was formed, which had a mere 700 members by October, but which proved to be a thorn in the side of the metalworkers' union leadership. Writing in the union journal, A. Shlyapnikov, the Bolshevik chairman of the union, warned of the dangers of craft unionism and cited the example of the Gruntal workshop, where eight welders had joined the welders' union, put forward a wage demand, and then left the factory when it had been refused; whereupon the owner had fired the rest of the workers, who had never been consulted about the welders' action.¹⁸ The welders' union paid scant regard to the veiled threats of Shlyapnikov, not joining the

15. Pravda, 41, 26 April 1917, p.4.

16. Professional'nyi Vestnik, 7, 16 December 1917, p.7.

17. Prof. Dvizh., p.125.

18. Metallist, 1-2, 17 August 1917, p.14.

metalworkers' union until January 1918.

The electricians' union was the only craft union to agree to fuse with the metalworkers prior to October. Other unions, such as those of gold- and silversmiths (1,300 members in October) and watch-makers (360 members) continued in existence until 1918.¹⁹ Precisely why these groups, and not others, formed craft unions is not, at this stage, possible to say.

The strength of craft unionism in Russia was not great when one compares it to other countries. There was not the same tradition of guilds in Russia as there was in Western Europe,²⁰ and so guild traditions played less of a formative role in the early phases of union construction than in the West. Moreover, as argued in chapter 1, skilled craftsmen in Russian industry were more 'modern' than those who had formed the 'model' unions in Britain. Russian craftsmen were less of an exclusive caste and thus less likely to see their interests as being different from those of other workers in the same industry. Craft unionism did not disappear overnight in 1917 but it did not prove a serious contender to industrial unionism, in spite of the fears of some union leaders.²¹

In a matter of eight months in 1917 Russian labour leaders achieved more in building powerful industrial unions than had been achieved in decades in the West. In the first phase of union con-

19. Prof. Dvizh., p.341.

20. Guilds (tsekhi) had been legalised by Peter the Great in 1722 but had never become deeply entrenched. In the 1850's and 1860's there was a campaign to abolish them. On the latter, see Zelni k's excellent account. Zelni k, R., Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia, Stanford University Press, 1971, pp. 120-133. For an interesting account of the tsekh system in the bakery trade at the beginning of this century see Ivanov, B., Po stupen'yam bor'by: zapiski starogo bol'shevika, M., 1934, pp. 167-9.

21. This does not mean that sectionalism was not a headache for union leaders once they came to implement collective wage contracts. See chapter 6.

struction in Russia - in the period after the 1905 - most unions that were set up had been trade unions, in the sense that they embraced workers in the same occupation across different factories. In 1917 a conscious effort was made to avoid a situation where there would be a number of different craft and trade unions within the same enterprise. The aim of labour leaders was 'industrial unionism', i.e. the construction of unions according to branch of industry, so that all workers who worked in the same industry, regardless of their job, would be members of the same union. At first, industrial unionism was not the norm. In the spring of 1917, for example, at the Triangle works four unions existed - for chemical workers, metalworkers, clerical workers and for foremen and technicians. At the Okhta powder works the unions of woodturners, powder-makers, construction workers, metalworkers and office-workers existed alongside each other. Gradually, however, efforts were made to establish one union for all workers in each enterprise.²²

At the Third Trade Union Conference in June - the first national conference of unions in 1917 - union leaders of all political persuasions argued the case for industrial unionism. There was pressure in some quarters for trade unionism, but Mensheviks and Bolsheviks united to quash this in the final resolution.²³ It was not merely the leadership which favoured industrial unionism, for when delegates from Petrograd metal works met to elect a board for the union on May 7, they overruled the secretary, who was prepared to allow the setting up within the union of sections to represent individual

22. Shatilova, T., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v 1917-18gg., L., 1927, p.8.

23. Tret'ya vserossiiskaya konferentsiya professional'nykh soyuzov 1917g: stenograficheskii otchet, M., 1927 (henceforward, Tret'ya konferentsiya). Pankratova is quite wrong to claim that Bolsheviks believed in revolutionary industrial unions, whereas Mensheviks believed in neutral trade unions. Pankratova, A., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v revolyutsii 1917g., M.L. 1927, p.56.

trades.²⁴

The consensus within the working class appears to have been that industrial unionism was superior to craft or trade unionism since it most closely corresponded to the idealised image of a working class united in struggle against the employers; but not all trade union leaders shared this enthusiasm.

The woodturners' union was the largest union in Petrograd to reject the policy of industrial unionism. By October it had 20,000 members which made it the seventh largest union in the capital.²⁵ Only a third of its members worked in wood-working factories and joinery enterprises, however; the rest worked as carpenters and joiners in other industries. In spite of its rampant Bolshevism, the woodturners' union pursued a steadfast craft policy. It refused to allow woodturners to join the union of the industry in which they worked. On 8 May a delegate council of the union rejected a plea to this effect from the metalworkers' union.²⁶ At the Okhta powder works woodturners refused the tariff category into which the chemical workers tried to put them and at Putilov carpenters and wood machinists objected to being placed in category three of the metalworkers' contract. On 1 August the woodturners' union put a wage contract to the SFWO, which turned it down.²⁷ Six days later a meeting of 57 factory delegates, having denounced the Kerensky government for imprisoning Bolsheviks, passed the following resolution:

24. Pravda, 51, 7 May 1917, p.3; Pravda, 57, 14 May 1917, p.3.

25. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, p.89.

26. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 2, 19 October 1917, p.12.

27. ibid., p.14. The rates proposed in the contract of 2r.20k. for highly skilled workers; 1r.80k. to 2r. for skilled; 1r.50k. to 1r.75k. for semi-skilled and 90k. for unskilled men and 75k. for unskilled women do not represent a wide spread of differentials and do not suggest craft elitism among skilled woodturners.

Every regenerated organisation, if it is to establish its work at the necessary level, must insist, when working out a contract, that one profession is not competent to determine the wages of another.²⁸

After two months of abortive negotiation with the employers, the union decided to prepare for a strike. On October 12 it issued a statement saying that a strike would begin four days later, since "at present the union does not have the wherewithal to restrain desperate workers from protests and excesses."²⁹ At the Putilov works woodworkers had already gone on a go-slow in protest at the refusal of management to negotiate with them separately. The Executive of the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions agreed to support the strike on condition that it involve only enterprises where woodworkers comprised a majority of the workforce.³⁰ A day after the strike had begun, however, an angry meeting of 8,000 woodworkers rejected this stipulation, calling on all woodworkers to join the strike.³¹ This call was condemned by Shlyapnikov since it disrupted normal working in hundreds of factories not connected with the wood industry. The strikers rejected charges of causing disorganisation and appear to have won reluctant support from other groups of workers. At the Baltic works and the Okhta explosives works factory committees refused to allow the carrying-out of work normally done by wood-turners and called for pressure to be put on the employers to compromise.³² The strike was still going on when the October Revolution

28. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 3, 12 December 1917, p.15.

29. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii nakanune oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya: dokumenty i materialy, M., 1962, p.277.

30. Rabochii Put', 36, 14 October 1917, p.4.

31. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde: dokumenty i materialy, M., 1957, p.128.

supervened and on 28 October it was called off.³³

In spite of the example of the woodturners' union, the record of the craft and trade unions must be pronounced a failure when measured against that of the industrial unions.³⁴ Sectional pressures of all kinds existed, and were a force to be reckoned with, but they did not fundamentally threaten the project of industrial unionism. This will become clear in the next chapter when we analyse the implementation of collective wage contracts.

Political composition of the trade unions

Soviet historians are fond of depicting political conflict within the trade unions in 1917 as a fight between reformist, economistic Mensheviks and militant revolutionary Bolsheviks, in which no punches were pulled. In reality the political history of the Petrograd trade unions was more complex than this manichaeian interpretation allows. Before analysing this history in detail, it is worth pointing out that the political centre of gravity of the Russian labour movement was far to the left of that of its Western counterpart. Prior to 1917 attempts to promote reformism in the labour movement had been made by

33. Professional'nyi Vestnik, 7, p.6.

34. So far we have used the term 'craft union' in a strict sense to denote a narrow exclusive union of workers of one specific trade. The woodturners' union was not a craft union in this sense, but rather a 'trade' union in the British sense, in that it embraced workers in several different wood trades. It was unable to establish itself as a proper industrial union because of the paucity of workers in the wood industry proper. One should beware of accepting Soviet usage of the term 'craft union' at its face value. Some unions were dubbed craft unions retrospectively in the 1920's, after another union had established itself as the industrial union for a particular branch of industry. For example, a tiny glass workers' union survived until 1921 as the 'industrial' union for workers in the glass industry. It was then absorbed into the chemical workers' union and its sorry history (it had opposed the October Revolution and remained obdurately Menshevik!) was re-written as that of a narrow craft union. See Shatilova, T., Ocherk istorii leningradskogo soyuza khimikov, 1905-18gg., L., 1927.

intellectuals (cf. the 'Economists', led by S.N. Prokopovich and Kuskova), by the government (cf. the Zubatov and Gapon unions) and by workers themselves (cf. the Workers of Russia's Manchester (1899), the Moscow printers in 1903, the Workers Voice group in Petersburg in 1905 and the Union of Workers for the Defence of their Rights in Khar'kov in the same year). These attempts at home-grown reformism never got very far, however, for the simple reason that even the most 'bread and butter' trade union struggles scuppered themselves on the rock of the tsarist state; all efforts to separate trade unionism from politics were rendered nugatory by the action of police and troops.³⁵ In this political climate trade unions grew up fully conscious of the fact that the overthrow of the autocracy was a basic precondition for the improvement of the workers' lot. It is true that there was a powerful moderating tendency in the trade unions, represented by right-wing Mensheviks such as those involved in the Workers' Group of the War Industries Committee, but even this tendency was verbally committed to a brand of socialist trade unionism which would have appeared strikingly dangerous to 'bread and butter' trade unionists such as Gompers in the USA or to the Liberals of the early TUC in Britain. It is thus important, when analysing the conflict between 'right' and 'left' in the Russian unions in 1917, to remember that even the 'right' was fairly left-wing by Western standards, since it was committed to socialism of a rather full-blooded kind.

35. Pipes, R., Social Democracy and the St. Petersburg Labor Movement, Harvard University Press, 1963, ch. 6. Wildman, A., The Making of a Workers' Revolution, Chicago University Press, 1967, esp. pp. 123-6, 137-49. Pospelovsky, D., Russian Police Trade Unionism, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971.

The approach to trade unionism of the two major political parties within the unions in 1917 sprang from their respective diagnoses and prognoses of the political situation in Russia. The Mensheviks believed that Russia was in the throes of a bourgeois revolution, and that therefore the unions should raise demands for the maximum democratisation of the social and political system.³⁶ They did not believe in the political 'neutrality' of the unions (they were on the side of 'democracy' and 'socialism') but they did not believe that the unions should take up positions on particular questions, such as the demand for all power to the soviets. In contrast, the Bolshevik position was summarised in the resolution on the party and the trade unions, passed by the Sixth Bolshevik party Congress in August:

The epoch of world war has inevitably become the epoch of sharpening class struggles. The working class is entering a terrain of immense social horizons which culminate in world socialist revolution. The trade unions are faced by the totally practical task of leading the proletariat in this mighty battle. Together with the political organisation of the working class, the trade unions must repudiate a neutral stance towards the issues on which the fate of the world labour movement now hangs. In the historic quarrel between 'internationalism' and 'defencism' the trade-union movement must stand decisively and unwaveringly on the side of revolutionary internationalism.³⁷

In Petrograd a conflict between these two perspectives took place on the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions. On 15 March the foundations were laid for what became the Central Bureau of the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, when eighteen representatives from different unions

36. See, for example, the article by D. Kol'tsov in Professional'nyi Vestnik, 3-4, 15 October 1917, p.6.

37. Shestoi s'ezd RSDRP (b): protokoly, M., 1958, p.264.

met together. Five days later, an executive committee was elected, which comprised four Bolsheviks (Schmidt, Razumov, Antoshkin, Lebedev), four Mensheviks (Rubsov, Volkov, Acheev, Gonikberg, and the syndicalist, Gastev).³⁸ The Central Bureau subsequently formalised its structure, changing its name to the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions. All unions in Petrograd were invited to send representatives to the Council, according to their size. Until June thirty unions were represented. This later rose to 50 and subsequently to over 70. Only class unions were allowed onto the Council, so unions of workers not considered to be proletarian, such as musicians, writers and theatre employees, were excluded.³⁹

According to its constitution, drawn up in May, the powers of the PCTU were coordinative rather than directive. The Council did not have the right to manage or intervene in the affairs of a member union, but in practice it sometimes did this, for example, by encouraging industrial unionism or by helping consolidate union structure. In spite of its self-denying ordinance, the PCTU also intervened in specific economic disputes, by giving advice, publicity or financial help. The range of issues on which the PCTU gave a lead to individual unions is shown by the following statistics. Between March and December the Executive Committee of the PCTU discussed 21 items of a political nature, 101 concerning organisational construction, 26 concerning representation, 10 concerning education, 8 concerning unemployment and 25 miscellaneous items. The 30 plenary sessions of the PCTU discussed 29 matters of a political nature, 26 concerning organisational

38. Prof. Dvizh., p.45.

39. ibid., p.57; 63.

construction, 14 concerning economic struggles, 4 concerning representation, 3 concerning unemployment, 3 concerning education and 5 miscellaneous items.⁴⁰

The vast bulk of PCTU business was practical and did not precipitate party conflict. Unlike trade unions in the West, however, the Russian trade unions were vitally interested in political questions, and as politics became more polarised in Russian society, political acrimony between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks on the PCTU increased. The first sign of this came on May 1 during discussions on the constitution. The Bolsheviks insisted on a sentence about "coordinating the actions of the unions with the political party of the proletariat". The Mensheviks demanded that the word "party" be in the plural. When the matter was put to the vote, they lost by 17 votes to 9.⁴¹ By May the Bolsheviks could command a majority on the PCTU, by getting the support of independents like the Mezhraionets,⁴² D.B. Ryazanov (who joined the party in August) and some of the Menshevik Internationalists. In the May elections to the Executive Committee, the Bolsheviks won a majority and at the end of the month the PCTU passed a resolution calling for the transfer of power to the Soviets. By the beginning of June the Bolsheviks were the strongest party on the PCTU, but they did not wield supremacy on this body as

40. ibid., pp. 58-9.

41. ibid., p.48. At the Third Conference of Trade Unions a row broke out over the same phrase. Conference voted to substitute the word 'movement' for 'party'. See John Keep's excellent discussion, Keep, J.H.L., The Russian Revolution: a study in mass mobilisation, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976, p.89.

42. The so-called Interdistrict Group of Social Democrats, of which Trotsky became leader after his return from the USA in 1917.

they did on the Central Council of Factory Committees (see chapter 7), for the presence of a strong group of Menshevik Internationalists, on whom the Bolsheviks relied for support, combined with disagreement among the Bolsheviks themselves, meant that the political line of the PCTU was not always clear-cut. The PCTU was caught napping by both the 18 June demonstration and the July Days. The PCTU supported the demonstration called by the Soviet EC for 18 June, but it was taken aback by the Bolshevik success in making this a show of opposition to the policies of the Soviet EC. Whereas factory committees busily organised contingents from the factories to march under Bolshevik banners, only odd unions, such as the needleworkers, strove to mobilise their membership. During the July Days the PCTU was completely isolated from the abortive insurrection by workers and soldiers. On 6 July the PCTU met with the Central Council of Factory Committees (CCFC) and the boards of the major unions. Trotsky attended this meeting and vigorously castigated the Soviet leaders for creating the disillusionment in the masses which had issued forth in the July Days; he called on the meeting to refuse any kind of support to the Kerensky government. Ryazanov was less certain: he argued that the new Coalition government could win back the support of the masses if it undertook bold measures. For two days no consensus was reached.⁴³ The final resolution, proposed by three Bolsheviks (Schmidt, Skrypnik and Antselovich) Ryazanov (soon to become a Bolshevik) and two Mensheviks (Astrov and Volkov) was passed unanimously with four abstentions. It was a milk-and-water affair,

43. Prof. Dvizh., p.50.

bearing all the hallmarks of compromise and making no mention of a transfer of power to the Soviets - the main aim of the July demonstrations.⁴⁴

The response of individual trade unions to the July Days was also mixed. On 23 July 1,400 woodturners condemned the Provisional Government for betraying the confidence of the working class and called for the immediate arrest of counter-revolutionaries, the abolition of the death penalty and the release of political prisoners.⁴⁵ On 7 July a meeting of delegates from all print works in Petrograd passed a resolution by 24 votes to 11, with two abstentions, accusing the Bolsheviks of fomenting the July Days and pledging support for the Soviet.⁴⁶ A general meeting of pharmacy employees agreed to rally round the Soviet against the counter-revolution and support the government only on condition that it carry out its 8 July programme.⁴⁷ These reactions attest the fact that on political matters the unions were still not able to pursue a policy as consistent as that of the factory committees, which operated almost as adjutants of the Bolshevik Central Committee.

During the Kornilov crisis, at the end of August, when General Kornilov attempted to overthrow Kerensky and crush the soviets, the PCTU worked in a more resolute fashion than in previous crises. On 26 August a joint meeting of the PCTU and the CCFC passed a motion on the defence of Petrograd, introduced by Lozovskii, which called for a workers' militia, an end to the persecution of political leaders,

44. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule : iyul'skii krizis : dokumenty i materialy, M., 1959, p.337.

45. Ekho derevoobolelochnika, 1, 7 September 1917, p.13.

46. Pechatnoe Delo, 4, 10 July 1917, p.8.

47. Zhizn' farmatsevtov, 8-9, 15 August 1917, p.7.

control of military units, public eating places, an end to queuing and a programme of public works to minimise unemployment.⁴⁸ The next day the joint meeting demanded that the government proclaim a republic, institute workers' control of production and fight the counter-revolution. On 29 August the two organisations threw themselves into the task of arming workers, organising defences around the city centre, and setting up patrols to guard the city centre, as news of Kornilov's advance on the capital filtered through.⁴⁹ The PCTU put 50,000r. at the disposal of the military centres, and the unions of food workers and woodturners also provided help.⁵⁰

This survey of the political history of the Petrograd unions shows that the picture which is sometimes painted of a Menshevik-dominated trade union movement counterposed to a Bolshevik-dominated factory committee movement does not correspond to reality, at least in Petrograd. Nationally, and in cities like Moscow, the Mensheviks did enjoy more influence than the Bolsheviks inside the unions, but in Petrograd this was not the case. As early as June, the Bolsheviks, with the support of Menshevik-Internationalists, could ensure that the political line of the PCTU was considerably to the left of that of the Soviet EC. Yet because of this reliance on Menshevik-Internationalists, political positions were usually arrived at by a process of compromise. On some of the most controversial questions of the day - such as the call for a transfer of power to the soviets - the

48. Prof. dvizh., p.53.

49. Stepanov, op. cit., p.172.

50. Bor'ba, 3, September 1917, p.1; Rabochii Put', 10 September 1917, p.4.

unions were unable to adopt a firm stance. Thus Bolshevik influence in the unions was far less certain than in the factory committees. However, the great bulk of trade union business did not involve politics directly, and so on a day-to-day basis, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks worked together quite happily on the PCTU.

On the boards of most major trade unions in Petrograd the Bolsheviks held a majority of places. The political make-up of these central boards was not a reflection of the political sympathies of the membership, for they were not elected directly by the membership, as were factory committees. Nevertheless the balance of political forces within the union boards does give an indication of the strength of the main political parties within the union movement as a whole.

On the board of the Petrograd metalworkers' union Bolsheviks had a slight majority of places but Mensheviks comprised a large minority, mainly due to the prestige of the individual Mensheviks concerned, rather than because of significant support for their politics amongst the rank-and-file.⁵¹ On the district boards, directly elected by factory delegates, Bolsheviks had more influence than their rivals. By the summer they dominated the boards of the Narva, the Petrograd, the I and II City, the Sestroretsk and the Kolpino districts of the capital. In Vyborg and Vasilevskii districts they still shared power with a Menshevik minority. Mensheviks were strong only in the Moscow district (mainly due to their influence at the Dynamo works) and the SR's were significant only in Nevskii district. SR's, generally, were

51. Prof. Dvizh., p.123.

a minor influence in the metal union, most of their industrial members channelling their energies into the factory committees.⁵² Menshevik influence in the union began to wane in the autumn of 1917 and at the first national congress of the union in January 1918, 75 delegates were Bolsheviks, 51 belonged to no political party, 20 were Mensheviks, 7 were Left SR's, 5 Right SR's and 3 were anarchists.⁵³

In the textile unions Bolsheviks were the dominant influence. The union published a journal, Tkach, which took a strongly revolutionary line, and at the first national conference in late September, 48 delegates were Bolsheviks, 10 Mensheviks, 4 SR's and two belonged to no party. The conference called for an energetic struggle to transfer power to the soviets.⁵⁴ The needleworkers' union also took a strongly Bolshevik line, although in Petrograd the union was not as strong as in Moscow, owing to the fact that its artisanal base had been undermined during the war. At the first national congress of the union in January 1918, 40 of the delegates were Bolsheviks, 5 were members of the Jewish Bund, 4 were Menshevik-Internationalists, one was a Polish socialist, one a Finnish socialist, one a Jewish Socialist, one a syndicalist and two were non-party.⁵⁵ Throughout 1917 the woodturners' union was a fortress of Bolshevism, with a Bolshevik chairman, I.F. Zholnerovich, and journal packed with articles critical of the conciliationist majority in the soviet. In

52. ibid., p.119. The SR's were a significant influence in the Leatherworkers' union, the transport workers' union and the union of postal employees.

53. Metallist, 2, 19 February 1918, p.9.

54. Volin, S., Deyatel'nost' men'shevikov v profsoyuzakh pri sovetskoi vlasti, Columbia, 1962, p.32.

55. Proletarii igly, 1, 25 March 1918, pp. 4-5.

summer the union sent out a questionnaire to woodworking establishments, asking about the political affiliation of their workforces. About 80 replies were received, of which 38 declared themselves for the Bolsheviks, 12 for the SR's and one for the Mensheviks. Replies ranged in formulation from "we belong to the Bolshevik party", "we sympathise with the Bolsheviks", "we've secretly joined the Bolshevik party", to "we have not joined a party, we are members of the workers' party", to "we beg you to explain what is a 'party' - we do not yet know; we know we are workers".⁵⁶ The union formed a squad of Red Guards in October, commanded by Zholnerovich, which took part in the storming of the Winter Palace. Yet in spite of its vigorous Bolshevism, the woodturners union steadfastly rejected official party policy on industrial unionism.

The Bolsheviks were strong in the union of food workers. A group of them on 5 March founded the union of flour workers, which was one of the first unions to publish a journal, Zerno Pravdy. As early as 14 May over 700 flour workers passed a resolution proposed by the Bolshevik leader of the union, Boris Ivanov, calling for a transfer of power to the soviets. A motion expressing confidence in the Soviet EC gained only six votes.⁵⁷ In July the union of flour workers amalgamated with the unions of confectionary workers and butchers to form the food workers' union. The flour workers had recalled their Menshevik deputy to the Soviet in May and elected two Bolsheviks and one SR Maximalist instead. The food workers' union came to be represented by a similar mix of deputies. In early November a general

56. Ekho derevoobdeloch_nika, 2, 19 October 1917, p.6.

57. Zerno Pravdy, 1-2, 10 July 1917, pp. 11-12.

meeting of food workers elected seven Bolsheviks, two SR Maximalists and one anarchist to the Soviet.⁵⁸ In the catering workers' union also, a Bolshevik majority shared power with an anarchist minority. At the first national conference of the food workers' union on 23 November the 45 delegates included 25 Bolsheviks and one sympathiser, 4 Left SR's, 3 SR Maximalists, 3 Menshevik Internationalists, two anarchists and 6 who belonged to no party.⁵⁹

In the leatherworkers' union a meeting on 12 March elected a board consisting of 4 Bolsheviks and one sympathiser, 5 SR's, one anarchist and two non-party workers.⁶⁰ In later months the Menshevik Internationalist, Yuzevich, came to be a leading light in the union. By September there were 9 Bolsheviks, 6 SR's, 1 Menshevik-Internationalist, 2 non-party and a handful of unknowns on the board.⁶¹ The political line of the board thus depended upon the way in which non-party members voted i.e. with the Bolsheviks or with the SR's. The contents of the union journal, Golos Kozhevnik, were unequivocally internationalist, which suggests that the SR's in the union were on the left wing of the party.

In the union of chemical workers, the union of employees of medicine and perfume enterprises and in the union of glass workers, Menshevik-Internationalists and Mensheviks were the major political force. The Bolsheviks were weak in all these unions (though not in

58. Nabat, 5., 18 November 1917, p.10. There was conflict between Bolsheviks and SR Maximalists in the union, with the latter accusing the former of trying to monopolise union control, and the former accusing the latter of sabotaging union work in certain bread factories. ibid., p.12 and Rabota soyuza muchnykh izdelii i osnovanie soyuza pishchevnikov 1917g., L., 1927, p.6.

59. Nabat, 6, 22 December 1917, p.5.

60. Prof. Dvizh., p.135.

61. ibid., p.143.

Moscow), but in the chemical workers' union, two members did have some influence.⁶²

A bastion of Menshevism was, of course, the printers' union. The peculiarly aristocratic character of many type-setters predisposed them towards moderation in politics and a rejection of extremism. Printers had one of the oldest and best organised unions, founded in 1903 and surviving down to 1917. During the war most printers supported the defencist wing of Menshevism and Mensheviks continued to dominate the union until the civil war period. In Petrograd Bolsheviks were rather more influential in the union than elsewhere, but they had only five places on the city board compared to the Mensheviks' fifteen.⁶³ The latter tried to steer the union clear of political involvement, though after the Kornilov rebellion - when trade unionists everywhere were flocking to the Bolshevik banners - they did adopt the slogan 'Unity in Action by all parties represented in the Soviet'. In the new elections to the union board in October, 9,000 printers elected eleven Internationalists and fourteen Defencists.⁶⁴ As late as 10 April, 1918, when the Petrograd board was again re-elected, 6,145 printers voted for the Menshevik/SR/Unemployer Workers' list; 3,416 voted for the Bolshevik list and 138 ballot papers were invalid.⁶⁵

This survey of the main factory unions shows that the Bolsheviks were the most influential political party within the boards of the unions of Petrograd. More political parties were represented in the

62. Shatilova, op. cit., p.64; Volin, op. cit., p.29.

63. Volin, op. cit., p.23.

64. Pechatnoe Delo, 13, 8 December 1917, pp. 10-11.

65. Novyi Den', 26, 11 April 1918, p.4.

unions than in the factory committee which made them, from the viewpoint of the Bolshevik Central Committee, less reliable allies in the period up to October.

The social composition of the labour movement

Before going on to examine the economic struggles of the trade unions it is important to analyse the relationship of the organised labour movement, which included both trade unions and factory committees, to the working class as a whole. As argued in chapter 1, two very broad social groups can be distinguished within the working class: on the one hand, skilled, proletarianised male workers and, on the other, peasants and women new to industry. The organised labour movement based itself on the former group and had certain difficulties relating to the latter group. The semi-proletarian peasant and women workers were unused to organisation; they were docile and apathetic for much of the time, although their quiescence would be punctuated by sudden bouts of rebellion, similar in character to peasant bunty or jacquerie. They were not accustomed to formal, durable organisation but tended to engage in direct action to achieve their ends - direct action which was sometimes violent or destructive. The task of the leaders of the labour movement was to channel the militancy of these workers into organised channels, to persuade them that the interests of the working class as a whole could properly be defended only by collective action and negotiation.

That it was the newer, inexperienced peasant and women workers who engaged most in forms of violent, elemental direct action, was a point made frequently by labour leaders. The Workers' Group of the

War Industries Committee, arguing in 1916 for the need for starosty to represent the interests of factory workers, noted that;

During the war, the composition of the working class has changed; many alien, undisciplined elements have come into the workforce. In addition, the intensification of work, the broad application of female and child labour, uninterrupted overtime and holiday work, over-work...have increased the number of grounds for conflict of all kinds and these often arise spontaneously. Instead of organised defence of their interests, workers engage in elemental outbursts and anarchic methods.⁶⁶

Kaktyn, writing in early 1918 in the journal of the Central Council of Factory Committees, made the same point, blaming "anarchic disorders" on the "not yet fully proletarianised mass of workers consisting of refugees, people from the countryside and others, temporarily swept into industry by the war".⁶⁷ Employers too blamed disorders on what they called the 'alien element' (prishlyi element). At the Franco-Russian works, for example, management complained that those who had come to the factory during the war had had a bad effect on the discipline of the workforce as a whole.⁶⁸ The disorders, of which the above commentators speak, can best be understood by examining two factories in detail.

The Pipe (Trubochnyi) Works was one of the largest enterprises in Petrograd, having a workforce of almost 19,000 in 1917. It was a state enterprise producing pipes of all kinds, fuses for hand-grenades, percussion tubes, detonating fuses, etc. During the war the workforce

66. Cited by Pankratova, A., Fabzavkomy Rossii v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku, M., 1923, p.152.

67. Novyi Put', 1-2, 14 January 1918, p.4.

68. Vestnik Obshchestva Zavodchikov i Fabrikantov, 5, 10 June 1917, p.3.

trebled in size; new workers came to the factory mainly from the countryside, since even before the war 60% of recruits had come from peasantry. Working-class women also entered the factory and by 1917 comprised nearly a third of the workforce. Almost all these new recruits did unskilled and semi-skilled jobs as machinists and sorters. Only about 14% of the workforce was skilled, consisting of male fitters and turners. Prior to 1917 only shops like the no. 8 instrument shop - with its highly skilled workforce - had any reputation for militancy. During the February Revolution militant workers could get unskilled workmates to strike only by sabotaging their machines.⁶⁹

Many of these new workers were untouched by the activities of the labour movement in 1917. A woman from shop no. 4, where 2,000 women worked, wrote to the Bolshevik newspaper for working women:

Sometimes you see how the women will read something, and from their conversations it becomes clear that a desire to step forward has been kindled in their heart. But to our great regret, at present there is very little organisation among the women of the Pipe Works. There are no women comrades among us to fan the spark of consciousness or point out to us the path to truth. We really need a comrade who can speak on the tribune in front of a sea of faces and tell⁷⁰ us where to go, who to listen to and what to read.

Around the same time as this woman was writing, in May 1917, an incident took place at the Pipe Works, which was fairly typical of factory life at this time, but which received considerable press coverage.

69. Spisok fabrichno-zavodskikh predpriyatii Petrograda, Pg., 1918; Murzintseva, S.V., 'Izuchenie formirovaniya sostava rabochikh Trubochnogo zavoda 1907-14gg.', in Rabochie Rossii v epokhu Kapitalizma, Rostov-on-Don, 1972, p.65; Prof. Dvizh., pp. 272-6.

70. Rabotnitsa, 7, 19 July 1917, p.14.

The Bolsheviks at the Pipe Works, their fortunes on the ascent, were agitating for new elections to the district soviet (Vasilevskii Island), and it was decided to hold these on May 17. However, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet arranged a meeting at the factory for the same day, so the shop stewards decided to postpone the elections. The workers in the foundry, however, decided to go ahead with their election regardless. Kapanitskii, a member of the council of starostas and an SR deputy to the Petrograd Soviet, was sent to persuade the foundry-workers to change their minds. When he arrived at the foundry, the workers were in a very ugly mood. The official protocol of a general meeting of the factory, held subsequently, describes what happened:

The workers in the factory sat comrade Kapanitskii in a wheelbarrow, beat him up and threatened to throw him in the furnace, but then decided to save the furnace for other people. They confined themselves to wheeling him out into the factory yard and then to the river. It was only thanks to the intervention of comrades in shops numbers 8 and 4, that he was released.⁷¹

A few Bolsheviks seem either to have provoked the violence or else to have connived at it, and consequently Mensheviks and SR's at the factory refused to take part in the elections which the Bolsheviks had been demanding. Three Left SR's who had agreed to stand on the Bolshevik slate withdrew from it. The starosta from the foundry made a public apology to a general meeting, blaming the violence on a handful of workers.⁷²

71. Rabochaya Gazeta, 61, 20 May 1917, p.3; Pravda, 64, 24 May, p.4; DeTo Naroda, 60, 28 May, p.4.

72. ibid.

~~handful of workers.~~⁷²

The adverse publicity which this incident received - it particularly shocked contemporaries because the violence was directed against an elected workers' representative, rather than a member of management - did nothing to quell unrest at the Pipe Works. Only a week later, the thousand soldiers who had been detailed to work at the factory (and who were from the countryside), demanded that they be represented by their own committee, rather than have representatives on the shop stewards' committee. At a meeting which the soldiers held, both the Bolshevik worker, Chertkov, and the Menshevik soldier, Stumillo, opposed this separatist proposal, but were howled down by the soldiers. One soldier denounced the workers at the factory: "They're bourgeois (burzhui), they've got carpets, and the next thing you know they'll have cooks and maids". It was with difficulty that violence was averted.⁷³

The Petrograd Metal Works, unlike the Pipe Works, was technologically very sophisticated, producing war ships, turret constructions, gun carriages, shells, mines, turbines, turbo-generators and other iron goods. It had a significant layer of skilled workers, strongly Bolshevik in 1913, but during the war the workforce had doubled to over 6,000 and it now had many inexperienced, unskilled workers. Conflict between skilled workers, who saw organisation as the answer to their problems, and unskilled workers, who saw violence as the solution, was a recurrent problem throughout 1917.

72. ibid.

73. Rabochaya Gazeta, 68, 31 May 1917, p.4.

A carpenter at the Metal Works wrote to his union journal describing the attitude of many of the workers towards the trade unions:

A majority of workers...in essence do not belong to the category of true proletarians. These people have come to the factory from the countryside in order to avoid military service and the war, or to assist the rural household with a good factory wage. This element...will move only when it feels that it is directly defending its own interests, but it has not grasped the principle of organising the working masses into unions for permanent, day-to-day struggle. They reduce this principle merely to paying subscriptions, and argue that they do not need this extra expense, or frankly admit that they are going to leave the factory as soon as the war is over and return to the countryside.⁷⁴

In November unskilled painters at the Metal Works beat up a representative of the metal workers' union and refused to release him until he agreed to sign an order granting all workers a wage of twelve rubles a day, backdated to 5 June.⁷⁵

Violent, elemental actions, such as these, posed a problem to the leaders of the labour movement. We shall explore this in greater depth in the next chapter. In conclusion, however, it must be pointed out how under-represented were the less proletarianised sections of workers in the unions and factory committees. The syndicalist leader of the metalworkers' union, A.K. Gastev, told the first national congress of metalworkers:

74. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 3, 12 December 1917, p.13.

75. Petrogradskii rabochii, 1, 1 February 1918, p.20.

In the unions we operate by basing ourselves on the skilled element of the workforce, for example, the turners and fitters...this is the most active section of the working class. The unskilled workers are, of course, less active.⁷⁶

A study of fitters at the Putilov works in 1918 showed not only how skilled workers dominated all working-class organisations, but how the most skilled fitters had been the first to join the metalworkers' union.⁷⁷ This is borne out by a complaint made by the employers' newspaper in the spring of 1917 that "it is usually the most skilled workers, they being the most conscious, who participate in the different committees - the factory committees, soviets, etc."⁷⁸ Of course, as the figures for union membership show, the unskilled and low-paid workers did join the unions - as an elementary defence against a deteriorating standard of living and food crisis - but they rarely played a leading role in them.⁷⁹

A good gauge of this is provided by examining the number of women workers in factory committees and trade unions in 1917. In spite of the fact that a third of the working class was female, the factory committees remained a bastion of the male workers. At the First Conference of Factory Committees, which took place from May 30 to June 15, of the 585 delegates, only about 20 were women (4%).⁸⁰ The leading woman Bolshevik, Alexandra Kollontai, was allowed to

76. Vserossiiskii uchreditel'nyi s'ezd rabochikh metallistov, Pg., 1918, p.87.

77. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, pp. 72-73.

78. Torgovo - Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 84, 25 April 1917, p.2.

79. Volin, op. cit., p.3.

80. Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya i fabzavkomy, vol. 2, M., 1927, pp. 217-231 (henceforward Okt. i Fab.).

speak to the national conference of factory committees on the subject of women workers and she attacked the indifference of factory committee leaders to women, warning of the political dangers of such an attitude.⁸¹ The Conference, however, did not bother to discuss the problem.

The problem was not so much that there were no women on the factory committees, but rather that they were grossly under-represented. At the Nevskaya footwear factory, for instance, where 45% of the 1,300 workers were women, none of the starostas was a woman in July.⁸² At the Pechatkin paper mill, where again about 45% of the 400 workforce was female, only two of the thirteen starostas were women.⁸³ In textile enterprises, where women formed the vast majority of the labour-force, the representation of women was rather better. At the Sampsonievskaya cotton spinning and weaving mill, for example, where 85% of the workforce were women, four out of seven factory committee members were female.⁸⁴ And at the New Cotton Mill, where 87% of the 1,800 workers were women, a woman was elected to go to the First Factory Committee Conference.⁸⁵

In June Kollontai spoke on the question of women workers to the Third All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions. She exhorted the assembly to take seriously the unionisation of women workers and reproached them for not paying attention to the questions of maternity provision and equal pay.⁸⁶ In September Kollontai wrote on

81. ibid., p.192.

82. LGIA, f. 1182, op. 1, d. 96, 1.17.

83. LGIA, f. 1186, op. 4, d. 16, 1.39.

84. Karpetskaya, N.D., Rabotnitsy i velikii oktyabr', L., 1974, p.59.

85. Okt. i Fab., vol. II, p.226.

86. Tret'ya Konferentsiya, pp. 425-6; 456-8.

the question of women workers in the journal of the Petrograd trade unions. She pressed male trade union leaders to treat women "not as appendages to men, but as independent, responsible members of the working class, having the same rights and also the same responsibilities to the collective". She called for the setting up of women's commissions within the trade unions and for unions to take up the struggle for the eight hour day for women, for a ban on night work, for equal pay, for protection of working mothers and for creches. She even entertained the setting up of independent women's unions in industries, such as domestic service, where female labour was preponderant.⁸⁷

By autumn the indifference of unions towards women workers seems to have resided not so much in a reluctance to recruit women to membership, as in a reluctance to take steps to involve them actively in union life. Paper membership of unions by October was high - even, it seems, among women workers. Although no direct figures for female membership exist, it is possible to make an indirect calculation of this. Since unions were organised on an industrial rather than craft basis, by correlating the membership of a particular union with the number of workers in the industry concerned, one gets an approximate value for the proportion of union members in each branch of industry.⁸⁸ With singular exceptions such as chemicals, the level of

87. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 2, 15 September 1917, p.5.

88. In Germany in 1907 women constituted 7.6% of total trade union membership, but by 1918 26.6%. Thonnessen, W., The Emancipation of Women, London: Pluto, 1976, pp. 57 and 144. In France in 1911 women comprised 9.8% of trade-union membership and 36% of the working population. Guilbert, M., Les femmes et l'organisation syndicale avant 1914, Paris, 1966.

unionisation was high - in the 70-80% region. There is no suggestion that in industries with a high proportion of women workers, such as textiles or food, unionisation was significantly lower than in industries where women were in a minority. Women were thus being recruited into unions, but other evidence points to the fact that they were not taking an active part in union life. Hardly any women, for example, were on the governing bodies of unions. Women comprised 70% of workers in the textile trades, but on the board of the textile union, which had 32,000 members in Petrograd by October, there were only two women, as against 13 men; and the boards of the metalworkers', leatherworkers' and sewers' unions were as unrepresentative - each having a solitary woman member.⁸⁹ Clearly, therefore, women were not significantly involved in leadership of either factory committees or trade unions.

Finally, teenage workers were under-represented in unions and factory committees. In view of the youthfulness of all labour and socialist organisations in 1917, this may appear to be a strange claim. After all, the average age of delegates to the first national congress of the metalworkers' union was only 29, and that of the delegates to the leatherworkers' congress about the same.⁹⁰ Yet there were few attempts by the unions to take up the demands of apprentices in any serious way or to support the demand of young people for the vote at 18. Young workers had to fight hard to get representation on the factory committees. The committees of the Baltic

89. Perazich, V., Tekstili Leningrada v 1917g., L., 1927, p.51; Prof. Dvizh., p.123, p.143.

90. Metallist, 2, 19 February 1918, pp. 8-9; Golos Kozhevnika, 10-11, 15 April, 1918, p.18.

works, Orudiinyi, Anchar and Putilov works all turned down this demand initially.⁹¹ And Novaya Zhizn' concluded an article on young workers by saying: "time and again, labour organisations ignore the legal and economic interests of proletarian youth".⁹²

It is clear that the problem of 'spontaneity' in the working class was not invented in Lenin's head.⁹³ In Lenin's theory the spontaneous character of working-class struggles is a universal phenomenon – in the absence of class-conscious leadership, but it is clear that the theory particularly fits the Russian context. The above review has tried to show that 'spontaneity' was not merely a problem for the Bolshevik party but for the labour movement as a whole. The militancy of the working class was largely 'spontaneous' and it was this militancy which provided the momentum of the revolutionary process in 1917. 'Spontaneity' by itself, however, was not enough to promote the interests of a united working-class on a long-term basis. Organisation was necessary – organisation which was basically the possession of skilled, literate, experienced male workers. These workers formed the backbone of the trade unions and factory committees and they

91. Dryazgov, G., Na puti k komsomolu, L., 1924, pp. 31-32; V boyakh: sbornik vospominanii, posvyashchennyi geroicheskoi bor'be vasilostrovtssev za 15 let, L., 1932, p.33.

92. Novaya Zhizn', 143, 3 October, p.4.

93. 'Spontaneity' is a translation of the term stikhiinost', an abstract noun derived from the word stikhiya, which means 'the elements'. Thus Lenin's concept of 'stikhiinost'' has the sense of something elemental, natural and untamed.

faced the task of channelling the militancy of the unskilled, low-paid, semi-proletarian layers of peasant and women workers into organised struggle.

6.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE BETTERMENT OF WAGES

A. STRIKES AND INFLATION

Although the cost of living had more than tripled between 1914 and January 1917, the wartime rate of inflation was as nothing compared to the rate for 1917. Strumilin estimates that in the course of that year official fixed prices in Petrograd increased 2.3 times, while market prices rose a staggering 34 times. He calculated that the daily calorie intake of a working man (3,600 calories) cost 2r.95k. at fixed prices in May but 27r.61k. at market prices; two months later, it would have cost 6r.37k. and 37r.19k. respectively.¹ Stepanov, using budget and price data, reckoned that by October 1917 the cost of living in Petrograd was 14.3 times higher than the prewar level (mixing fixed and market prices).² In table 16 are reproduced Stepanov's calculations of monthly real wage levels in six factories between January and October 1917. It is apparent that despite huge increases in nominal wages, by October real wages were down by between 10% and 60% on the January level which, of course, was well below the prewar level.³

Not unexpectedly, spiralling inflation had the effect of pushing more and more workers to strike for higher wages. Nationally, the

1. Strumilin, S.G., Zarabotnaya plata i proizvoditel'nost' truda v promyshlennosti, M., 1923, p.25; Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, p.352.

2. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, p.53. It is impossible to construct an accurate price index for Petrograd in 1917, in view of inflation and the paralysis of statistical agencies. Stepanov's calculations are the best one can hope for.

3. The decreases were smaller in percentage terms in low-wage industries, such as textiles and tobacco, than in the metal industry.

Table 16

Real Wages: January - October, 1917

Month 1917	Obukhov works			Parviainen			Baltic works			Nevskaya cotton		
	Price index (1913=1)	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917
January	3.5	160	46	100	144	41	100	86	24	63	18	100
April	4.5	192	43	93	212	47.1	115	142	32	130	29	151
June	6.0	319	53	115	282	27	114	112	19	135	23	128
August	10.5	326	31	67	313	30	73	144	14	-	-	-
September	11.4	345	30	65	303	27	66	191	17	127	20	111
October	14.3	464	32	69	-	-	-	141	10	193	14	78
Month	Kersten mill			Shaposhnikov tobacco			Chernorabochie (Labour exchange data)					
	Price index (1913=1)	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917	nominal wage in rubles	real wage in rubles	as % Jan 1917
January	3.5	33	10	100	47	13	100	97	28	100		
April	4.5	100	22	220	-	-	-	111	24	86		
June	6.0	82	14	140	131	22	169	122	20	71		
August	10.5	95	9	90	133	13	100	147	14	50		
September	11.4	93	8	80	180	16	123	141	12	43		
October	14.3	115	9	90	155	11	85	167	12	43		

Source: Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya Oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, pp. 54-5.

monthly number of strikers rose from 35,000 in April, to 175,000 in June, to 1.1 million in September to 1.2 million in October.⁴ The geographical area covered by strikes broadened out from the Petrograd and Central Industrial Region in spring, to the whole of European Russia by autumn. All the time, strikes became more organised, more large-scale and more militant. Strikes were a politicising experience for those who took part in them: they saw with their own eyes how employers were going on investment strike, engaging in lockouts, refusing to accept new contracts or to repair plant; how the government was colluding with the employers, curbing the factory committees and sending troops to quell disorder in the Donbass. The strikes were important, therefore, in making hundreds and thousands of workers aware of political matters and in making the policies of the Bolshevik party attractive to them. Yet from a practical point of view, strikes were less and less effective. Their chief aim was to achieve wage increases in line with the cost-of-living, but in practice workers were falling further and further behind inflation. As the economic crisis deepened, employers were no longer either willing or able to concede huge increases and increasingly they preferred the prospect of closure and redundancies to that of bankruptcy caused by a high wages bill. In Petrograd strike activity did not conform to the national pattern. There was a plethora of strikes of a spontaneous, atomised character in the spring (see Chapter 3), at a time when the working class nationally was relatively calm. The economic crisis set in early in the capital

4. Gaponenko, L.S., Rabochii klass Rossii v 1917g., M., 1970, pp. 378, 384, 436.

however, because of its reliance on the transport system for fuel and raw materials, and it quickly dawned on labour leaders that in an economic crisis, strikes were not necessarily an effective weapon for defending jobs and living standards. The labour movement therefore, from early summer onwards, turned its attention to two alternative modes of struggle: on the one hand, a fight for collective wage contracts to cover all workers in each branch of industry; and secondly, the battle for workers' control of production.

Workers in Petrograd did not stop going on strike after the early summer, but those workers who did strike were not, in the main, in the major factory industries. They were the workers who in the early months of the revolution had been considered "backward" - workers in non-factory industries, women etc. Because the focus of this study is on workers in factory industry, these strikes will not be examined, but it is important to mention them, in order to situate the struggle for collective wage contracts (tariffs) in context. In May and June there was a rash of strikes by market-stall tenders and shop assistants, envelope-makers and a threatened strike by railway workers. In June many of the strikes involved extremely low-paid women workers, principally laundrywomen, catering workers and women dye-workers, (who were on strike for four months). Others who struck over the summer included sausage-makers and building workers. All of these strikes were small, but in spite of the fact that they involved workers with no traditions of struggle, they were militant and fairly well-organised - throwing up strike committees and trade unions. In September there were three rather bigger strikes, led by unions of pharmacy employees, paper-workers and railway workers.

Finally, as mentioned in chapter 5, there was an important strike by wood-turners in October. These strikes formed the background to the campaign for collective wage contracts.

B. THE CAMPAIGN FOR COLLECTIVE WAGE CONTRACTS ('TARIFFS')

In a matter of months in 1917, collective bargaining developed in Russia to a level which far outstripped that of Western Europe. Centralised collective bargaining was slow to develop in the West and was probably most advanced in Britain by 1914; but even there, bargaining at a regional or national level on questions of pay and hours was comparatively rare. The outbreak of war led to a big expansion of collective bargaining in Britain, with agreements on war bonuses and the emergence of Whitleyism; but the big lead enjoyed by Britain in this area of labour relations was quickly lost to Russia in 1917.

In Russia the conclusion of collective wage contracts between trade unions and employers' associations, covering all workers in a branch of industry in one area, was one of the greatest achievements of the unions in 1917. The unions of Petrograd led the way in the conclusion of such contracts, or 'tariffs', as they were known. 25 contracts were signed in the capital up to October, and a further 24 up to July 1918.⁵ Moscow, Sormovo, Khar'kov and the Donbass slowly followed the example of the metropolitan unions, though employers' organisations put up stronger resistance to cen-

5. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, Pg., 1919, p.10.

tralised collective bargaining in these areas.⁶

The trade union leaders of Petrograd were pushed into centralised collective bargaining by the spontaneous, atomised wages struggles of spring 1917. These had meant that the less well-organised, less strategically-placed workers had been unable to achieve increases in wages on a par with those achieved by workers who were better-organised and whose skills were in demand. The localised character of these wage struggles had increased the already considerable variation in wage levels between different factories in the same industry. It was in order to overcome growing unevenness in wage levels and to help the low-paid, that unions began to draw up contracts. A further consideration which disposed the unions towards collective bargaining was the fact that elemental wages struggles stultified efforts to create an organised, united labour movement. The board of the metalworkers' union issued a strongly-worded statement in early summer which said:

Instead of organisation we, unfortunately, now see chaos (stikhiya); instead of discipline and solidarity - fragmented actions. Today one factory acts, tomorrow another and the day after that the first factory strikes again - in order to catch up with the second. In individual enterprises, alas, we see not even purely mechanical factory actions, but irresponsible actions by individual sections within the factory, such as when one section delivers an ultimatum to another. The raising of demands is often done without any prior preparation, sometimes by-passing the elected factory committee. The metalworkers' union is informed

6. Vestnik Metallista, 1917, 1, p.18.

about factory conflicts only after demands have been put to management, and when both sides are already in a state of war. The demands themselves are distinguished by lack of consistency and uniformity.⁷

The contracts, which were drawn up by the unions, were designed to overcome such inconsistency. They sought, firstly, to specify the wage rates for all jobs in a particular industry and thus to rationalise the pay structure; secondly, to diminish differentials in earnings between skilled and unskilled workers; thirdly, they aimed to standardise working hours, improve working conditions, control hiring and firing and to establish a procedure for the arbitration of disputes.

Collective bargaining, generally, is a double-edged sword. From the point of view of labour, it marks an extension of trade-union power in the sphere of wage bargaining and the recognition by employers of trade-union legitimacy. From the viewpoint of capital, however, collective bargaining can be a means of incorporating unions into an established system of industrial relations and of undercutting the influence of the union rank-and-file in favour of 'responsible' officials. In Petrograd some sections of employers and some circles of government were not unaware of the potential advantages of collective bargaining,⁸ but their hopes were quickly dashed, since the balance of power in 1917 was so decisively tilted in favour of the unions. The result was that the SFWO tended to find

7. Za 20 let: k dvadtsatiletiyu soyuza metallistov, ed. Rabinovich, V., L., 1926, pp. 98-9.

8. See statement of the Special Council on Defence in Browder, Provisional Government, vol. II, Stanford University Press, 1961, p.170; and statement by SFWO on 3 June, LGIA, f. 1278, op. 1, d. 113, l.86.

union proposals unacceptable, and negotiations proved to be extremely protracted. In six cases, involving leatherworkers, glassworkers and bakers and others, no agreement could be reached and the unions forced through the contract unilaterally. Several unions, including the printers and paperworkers, threatened to go on strike in order to force the employers' hands. Most other unions, including the metalworkers, threatened strike action in the course of negotiations. Collective wage contracts, therefore, did not come about without a fight.

C. THE METALWORKERS' CONTRACT

The following account of the conflict between the metalworkers' union and the metalworking section of the SFWO over the collective wage agreement is interesting not merely for what it shows about the relationship between organised labour and capital, but also for what it shows about the complex and often fraught relationship between the organised labour movement and the unorganised rank-and-file. It reveals how a section of the working class, considered to be one of the most 'backward' i.e. the chernorabochie (unskilled labourers) of the metal industry, organised in pursuit of their economic welfare and developed a revolutionary political consciousness through the experience of this essentially 'economic' struggle. At the same time, the account shows how the militancy of the chernorabochie came close to jeopardising the contract being negotiated on their behalf by the union leaders.

In May a special rates commission was set up by the board of the metal union to collect information about wages in the 200

different metal works of Petrograd and to investigate the 166 different claims which had been made by metalworkers in March and April. The task of drawing up a contract was by no means easy, since there were about 300 different jobs in the metal industry. Nevertheless, after nearly two months' work the union produced a contract which divided metalworkers into four groups - highly skilled, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. It employed three criteria to classify the 300 jobs in the industry into these four categories and to determine appropriate rates for each job: firstly, the necessary minimum for subsistence; secondly, the skill, training and precision required by each job; thirdly, the difficulty, arduousness or danger of the job. Each of the four groups was sub-divided into three categories to take into account differences in length of work experience.⁹ The union hoped to persuade the SFWO to accept the wage rates proposed for each of the four categories in return for a promise of no further conflict while the contract was in force.

On 22 June negotiations between the union and the SFWO began, but almost immediately reached an impasse because of what A. Shlyapnikov, the Bolshevik leader of the union, described as the "groundless rejection by our factory delegates of all the SFWO proposals, particularly the point about guaranteed productivity norms".¹⁰ The board of the union was prepared to agree to a productivity clause

9. Metallist, 1-2, 17 August 1917, p.7.

10. ibid., p.4.

in the contract, but managed only with great difficulty to persuade the union delegates to accept such a clause. At a further delegate meeting on 2 July it was agreed to accept productivity clauses as a way of "maintaining production at a proper level" and of "removing the necessity for trivial personal supervision by members and organs of administration". The delegates furthermore agreed that the fixing of norms of output "puts on the agenda the question of workers' control of production as the necessary guarantee of both labour productivity and the productivity of the enterprise as a whole".¹¹ Having gained agreement in principle to a productivity clause in the contract, the union went back to the negotiating table on July 12; but in the meantime the July Days had occurred, with the result that the SFWO took a much tougher line and clashes arose immediately over the size of the wage increases proposed by the union.

Meanwhile an explosive conflict had been building up among the low-paid workers of the metal industry, which centred on the Putilov works. Accelerating inflation was rendering the situation of the low-paid ever more desperate. Recognising that their weak position in the labour market was compounded by lack of organisation, chernorabochie from factories throughout Petrograd met together on 9 April to form a union of unskilled workers.¹² This existed only for a couple of months and then dissolved into the metalworkers' union at the end of June. It was a short-lived but significant development, for it signalled that unskilled workers, having taken little part in the labour movement up to this time, were beginning

11. ibid., p.20.

12. Rabochaya Gazeta, 33, 16 April 1917, p.4.

to move. It was at the Putilov works, where some 10,000 chernorabochie were employed, that the unskilled were most active. Wages at Putilov were lower than average and those of the unskilled were barely enough to keep body and soul together. The works committee was in negotiation with management in April and May over a wage rise, which would have given unskilled men a wage of six rubles a day and unskilled women five rubles, but no agreement could be reached on whether the new rates should be backdated.¹³ On 21 April the works committee appealed to chernorabochie "to refrain from careless and ill-considered actions at the present time and peacefully await the solution of the problem by the works committee".¹⁴

During May prices began to climb and food shortages became acute. By the beginning of June the distress of chernorabochie was deep. On 4 June chernorabochie from nine metal works on Vyborg Side met to formulate the demands which they wished the metalworkers' union to include in its forthcoming contract. They agreed to:

"recognise the necessity of conducting an organised struggle together with all workers in the metalworking industry and to decisively repudiate sectional actions except in exceptional circumstances".

They voted for a daily wage of twelve rubles for unskilled men and ten rubles for unskilled women; equal pay for women doing the same jobs as men ; a sliding scale of wage increases to keep abreast of inflation and an end to overtime.¹⁵

13. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets v trekh revolyutsiyakh, M., 1933, pp. 327-8.

14. ibid., p.329.

15. Pravda, 77, 9 June 1917, p.4; Zemlya i Volya, 63, 9 June 1917, p.3.

At the Putilov works the wage dispute dragged on. At the beginning of June several shops announced that they intended to go on strike. On 8 June the works committee beseeched them to change their minds, since the dispute was about to be referred to arbitration by the Ministry of Labour.¹⁶ On 19 June the Ministry turned down the rates proposed by the works committee. In a flash, the whole workforce was out on strike.¹⁷ The works committee called on the charismatic Bolshevik agitator, Volodarskii to come to the factory to persuade the workers to return to work. The next day he managed to persuade most shops to end their strike, but those with high proportions of unskilled workers, such as the gun shop, embarked on a go-slow.

On 20 June the Petersburg Committee of the Bolshevik party held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation of Putilov. S.M. Gessen described how seething economic discontent at the factory was feeding political radicalism.

In the Narva district there is a sharp change of mood in our favour, as the recent elections (to the district soviet, SAS), won by the Bolsheviks, show. The Putilov works, which determines the mood of the whole district, has come over decisively to our side. The militant mood of the Putilov works has deep economic roots. The question of wage increases is an acute one. From the very beginning of the revolution, the workers' demands for wage increases were not satisfied. Grozdev came to the factory and promised to satisfy their demands but did not fulfil his promises. On the 18 June demonstration the Putilovtsy bore a placard saying, "They have deceived us!...We will be able to restrain some Putilovtsy,

16. Mitel'man, M.I., 1917 god na Putilovskom zavode, L., 1939, p.98.

17. Gaza, op. cit., p.334.

but if there are actions elsewhere, then the Putilov works will not be restrained and will drag other factories behind it.¹⁸

This proved to be a remarkably prescient analysis, since it correctly forecast the catalytic role which would soon be played by the Putilovtsy in bringing about the July Days.

On 21 June a meeting took place at the Putilov works of representatives from 73 metal works committees, from the union and from the socialist parties, to discuss the contract which the union was to begin to negotiate with the SFWO the following day. This meeting agreed unanimously to make preparations for joint action in support of the contract, including a general strike if necessary; only a Baptist worker from the Baltic factory opposed this proposal.¹⁹ The meeting passed a fiery resolution by 82 votes to 4, with 12 abstentions, pledging support to the Putilovtsy but warning of the dangers of trying to go it alone:-

The concerns of the Putilov workers are the concerns of the Petrograd proletariat as a whole...Partial economic action under present economic conditions can only lead to a disorganised political struggle by workers in Petrograd. We therefore propose that the Putilov workers restrain their justified displeasure at the conduct of the ministers who have delayed the solution of the conflict by every means. We believe it is necessary to prepare our forces for a speedy and general action. Furthermore, we propose to the Putilovtsy that they let the metalworkers' union conduct negotiations with the employers and ministers concerning their demands... We believe that even if the wage increases are now granted, the uninterrupted rise in the price of commodities and of accommodation will render

18. ibid., pp. 346-7.

19. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, p.106 (henceforward Gaza ii op. cit.).

this gain worthless. And so a decisive struggle is necessary to establish workers' control of production and distribution, which, in turn, requires the transfer of power into the hands of the soviets.²⁰

A Putilov worker, reporting on the conference for Pravda explained how the three-month struggle for better wages had radicalised his fellow-workers:

We have seen with our own eyes...how the present Provisional Government refuses to take the resolute measures against the capitalists, without which our demands cannot be satisfied. The interests of the capitalists are dearer to it than the interests of the working class.²¹

By the end of June the labour organisations of Putilov could no longer restrain the militancy of the low-paid, and found themselves in danger of being sucked into the maelstrom of discontent. An angry crowd beat up members of the board of the consumer cooperative, claiming that they were selling products of poor quality.²² On 26 June the works committee and the district soviet set up a 'revolutionary committee' to keep order at the factory. A Bolshevik member of the works committee, I.N. Sokolov, reported:

The mass of workers in the factory...are in a state of turmoil because of the low rates of pay, so that even we, the members of the works committee, have been seized by the collar, dragged into the shops and told: 'Give us money'.

By 3 July the labour organisations could restrain the workers no longer. Having made contact with revolutionary regiments, they

20. Rabochaya Gazeta, 89, 24 June 1917, p.4.

21. Gaza, op. cit., pp. 349-50.

22. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.109.

emptied onto the streets.²³ The secretary of the Petrograd Soviet, the Bolshevik A. Tsvetkov-Prosveshchenskii, attended a factory meeting at Putilov on 3 July and recalled:

The mood of the workers was so agitated that any speaker who spoke against the action, including even the Bolsheviks, was not allowed to speak and was interrupted by cries of 'Clear off!'²⁴

The debacle in which the July Days culminated seems to have had little effect on the movement of the low-paid. On 1 July the first proper delegate conference of chernorabochie had taken place, with representatives from 29 of the largest factories. This demanded fixed prices on subsistence commodities and voted against action by individual factories.²⁵ On 7 July the chernorabochie at Putilov met together to declare that they could no longer live on 6r.20k. a day. They demanded 10 rubles and a "curb on the rapacious appetites of those blood-suckers and pirates who speculate in everyday necessities".²⁶ Three days later the second delegate conference of chernorabochie met to discuss the deadlock which had overtaken negotiations on the contract.

On 12 July negotiations between the metalworkers' union and the SFWO resumed. The draft contract recommended hourly rates of 2r. to 2r.20k. for the highly skilled, 1r.90k. for skilled workers; 1r.75k. for semi-skilled workers and rates of between 1r. and 1r.50k. for unskilled male workers, falling to 80k. for unskilled female workers.²⁷

23. For an excellent account of the July Days see Rabinowitch, A., Prelude to Revolution, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968, esp. pp. 147-151.

24. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.114.

25. ibid., p.110.

26. ibid., p.112.

27. Vestnik Metallista, 1, p.16.

The SFWO did not object to the rates proposed for skilled categories, but rejected outright the rates proposed for the unskilled, since the relative cost of conceding the wage increases to the low-paid would have been much greater than the cost of the increases to highly-paid. Instead the employers proposed an hourly rate of 70k. to 80k. for unskilled men and 60k. for unskilled women and between 1r.30k. and 1r.50k. for semiskilled workers.²⁸ Stalemate ensued and it was agreed to turn to government arbitration.

Against the advice of the Bolshevik Central Committee, which had not yet recovered from the battering it received at the hands of the Kerensky government after the July Days, the Bolshevik leaders of the metalworkers' union began to make preparation for a general strike. The blockage of the contract negotiations had created a further groundswell of discontent among metalworkers and convinced the union leadership of the need to prepare for action. At Putilov around 17 July, mortise-makers, borers, planers and saddle-makers were all on strike - to the annoyance of the shop and works committees - but it was not until 22 July that general unrest flared up.²⁹ On that day the government arbitration commission announced its final decision: chernorabochie were to get 10% less than was proposed by the contract, but more than was on offer from the SFWO. The SFWO, however, immediately announced that it would not accept the decision. The next day a meeting of union delegates from the factories agreed, with one vote against and one abstention, to call a general strike.

28. Pravda, 93, 28 June 1917, p.4; Za 20 let, pp. 105, 112.

29. Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda v 1917g., M., 1979, p.459 (henceforward Fab. zav. kom.).

The response to the SFWO's rejection of the arbitration settlement was instant. On 25 July 152 chernorabochie from 52 factories met at the Putilov works and backed the previous day's decision by the union to call a general strike. They also passed the following political resolution:

We...protest most decisively against the policies of the Provisional Government, which is horse-trading with the capitalists and the Kadets. We demand the immediate transfer of power into the hands of revolutionary leaders (vozhdei), i.e. into the hands of the soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies. Only they can save the country from starvation and destruction both at the Front and the Rear. But Messrs. Pal'chinskii and Co. can save nothing and only make the state of the country worse. We also demand the immediate dispersal of the State Duma and State Council and the bringing to book of those who slander the party activists. We protest against the persecution of comrade Lenin* and against the destruction of our political and trade-union organisations.³⁰

No sooner had the chernorabochie committed themselves to a general strike, than they were overtaken by events. The Ministry of Labour announced that the settlement proposed by the arbitration commission would be made binding on the employers. On 26 July a further meeting of metalworkers' delegates met to discuss whether or not to go ahead with the strike, in view of the government's decision. The feeling expressed by most factory delegates was that it would be very difficult to sustain a strike in the existing conditions. The union and the leaders of all the socialist parties recommended acceptance of the arbitration settlement, but whilst the delegates agreed to call off the strike, they voted unanimously,

30. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.129. At the point marked by the asterisk, this resolution has been bowdlerised by Stalinist editors in order to exclude the names of Trotsky, Zinoviev et al.

with ten abstentions, not to accept the 10% reduction in the wage rates for chernorabochie decided by the arbitration commission.³¹

In spite of this the board of the union resolved to go ahead and accept the reduced offer made by the arbitration commission. It managed to cajole a delegate meeting into accepting the compromise as the best they could hope to achieve. On 7 August the contract was duly signed.³² The union may have thought that its problems were now over, but they had not counted on either the continuing opposition to the rates agreed in the wage contract or to the difficulties of actually implementing the contract. Some of the strongest opposition to the contract came from workers in state enterprises. The Artillery Administration accepted the contract in principle but expressed opposition to some of its clauses. Workers in the enterprises subject to the Artillery Administration insisted on ratification of the contract in full, although they felt the rates to be too low. In spite of some pressure to increase the rates from rank-and-file workers, the full contract was implemented by the Artillery Administration on 26 September. In the Naval Department rank-and-file opposition to the wage levels in the contract was far more powerful. A conference of workers in enterprises subject to the Department accepted the principles of the tariff on 11 September but upped the rates.³³ This led to wrangles between the Naval Department, the Naval works committees and the metalworkers' union and a decision was made to hold a ballot of all workers under the Naval Department. At the Baltic works on 16

31. Za 20 let, pp. 117-8; LGIA, f. 1477, op. 3, k. 1, l.66.

32. Vestnik Metallista, 1, pp. 1-6. The SFWO signed reluctantly. At a meeting of the Petrograd district section of the city SFWO on 3 August A.G. Berger urged colleagues to accept the contract, since, although its wage rates were high, it would make for uniformity and, moreover, made provision for piece rates and productivity deals. LGIA, f. 1278, op. 1, d. 183, l.127.
p.387.

October the works committee discussed whether or not to accept the original terms of the contract. A Bolshevik resolution recommending acceptance was passed by 29 votes to 15 against an anarchist resolution supporting higher rates and smaller differentials.³⁴ The result of the general ballot, however, was to reject the original contract by 27,000 votes to 23,000.³⁵ The contract had still not been accepted in the enterprises of the Naval Department at the time of the October Revolution.

The unskilled workers in the metal industry reluctantly accepted the contract; but rocketing inflation meant that by the time the contract came into force, its rates for the unskilled were already below subsistence level. In general, chernorabochie resigned themselves to the contract, feeling that even a small increase would stave off destitution. At Putilov the chernorabochie on 28 July agreed not to accept the arbitration commission compromise, but later changed their minds.³⁶ However a further round of émeutes broke out at the factory because management refused to backdate the contract to March. The works committee desperately appealed for calm at the beginning of August.

Comrades! His Majesty the Working Class, the Proletariat, is only truly majestic when it is united, not fragmented, when the will of thousands is represented as a single will...to our great regret, by no means all comrades are aware of this. Habits of the old order, now sunk into oblivion, have left deep traces among the unconscious section of the workforce... Now the situation is such that neither the

34. ibid., pp. 395-6.

35. ibid., p.404.

36. Gaza, op. cit., p.306.

employer, the directors, the shop manager or foreman has the right to increase or decrease earnings. That requires the permission, the sanction of the general boss (Obshchego Khozyeina), which for the workers is their national or the Petrograd union, and for the employers, the SFWO... Recently several sections of workers have gone on strike solely in order to speed up the examination of their demands, paying no regard whatever to the fact that those representatives elected by them to defend their rights are exhausting themselves, trying to satisfy their just demands... and to achieve a quick solution to the problem. In the present situation, by your strikes, comrades, you only provide more ammunition for your enemies... Finally, we must recognise that the essence of the problem of the suffering, starving, impoverished people lies in the general political situation of the country and in the general economic chaos.³⁷

At Putilov, as elsewhere, the contract was implemented in the course of September and temporarily relieved the misery of the chernorabochie; but inflation continued to rise steeply and to plunge the low-paid towards beggary. Immiseration, together with deep political frustration at the Provisional Government's failure to tackle the pressing problems afflicting the people of Russia, encouraged chernorabochie in the Petrograd metal industry to keep meeting together. During August three conferences took place to discuss redundancies, the growing counter-revolutionary threat and the crisis of the Kerensky government.

To implement the contract, rates commissions were created in the factories to distribute workers into wage categories and to fix price rates. These commissions comprised an equal number of worker and management representatives. All disputes were referred by the factory committees to a Central Rates Commission.³⁹ With inflation

37. Rabochii Kontrol' i natsionalizatsiya promyshlennykh predpriyatii Petrograda v 1917-19gg., vol. I, L., 1947, pp. 137-140 (henceforward Rabochii kontrol').

38. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.130; Mitel'man, op. cit., p.133.

39. Metallist, 1922, 12, p.43; Vestnik Metallista, 1, p.47.

soaring wildly, it was natural that workers should attempt to achieve as high a wage classification for themselves as possible. The refusal of the rates commissions to capitulate to such sectional pressure engendered bitter conflict. At the Putilov works a general meeting of planers, borers and mortise-makers called on workers in these three crafts in all factories to come to a conference to discuss their low categorisation in the contract.⁴⁰ In the crucible shop workers walked out in mid-September when they learnt the category to which they had been assigned. A general meeting of workers in the gun shop called on them to return to work, saying "your strike only plays into the hands of the employers and disorganises the solid ranks of Putilov workers".⁴¹ In the shrapnel shop some workers tried to induce the foremen to introduce bonuses on their piece rate in order to boost their earnings.⁴² At the New Parviainen works some 200 fitters and turners in the repair department went on strike to protest their contract classification at the beginning of October - an action lauded by anarchists but deplored by the Bolshevik factory committee.⁴³ Some time later chernorabochie at the factory demanded an equal wage for all workers regardless of skill - a demand turned down by a general factory meeting.⁴⁴ At the Rosenkrantz works contract disputes had to be referred to the Central Rates Commission, which finally announced its decision in early

40. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.128.

41. Stepanov, op. cit., p.82.

42. Pankratova, A., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v revolyutsii 1917g., M.L., 1927, p.40.

43. Novaya Zhizn', 148, 6 October 1917, p.4; Rabochii Put', 35, 13 October 1917- p.4.

44. Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev, vol. II, M., 1971, p.43.

November. When the decision became known, several groups of workers placed in category III appeared at the director's office armed with rifles to demand reclassification. When the director pointed out that they were flagrantly contravening the decision of the Commission, the workers retorted: "We spit on the union and on its rates commission". A similar incident occurred a few days later at the factory, and when Shlyapnikov, now the Commissar of Labour in the new Bolshevik government, heard about it, he ordered the district Soviet to arrest the perpetrators of violence.⁴⁵ At the Erikson works electricians carted out a foreman, but a general meeting of workers insisted that the electricians apologise, on pain of dismissal.⁴⁶ At the Cable, Anchar and Baranovskii works chernorabochie engagedⁱⁿ brief strikes in protest against the low rates of the contract.⁴⁷ In a few factories management was coerced into paying more than the going rate, but the metalworkers' union strongly opposed this, suggesting to the SFWO that it fine any of its members who did not abide by the contract.⁴⁸ As early as August, Shlyapnikov wrote a stern article in the union journal condemning sectional opposition to the contract:

We propose to comrades dissatisfied with the rates commissions to send petitions directly to the union and not to try to settle disputes out of court, so as not to bring disorganisation into our ranks...Our contract does not open the gates to the kingdom of socialism...it is an agreement between two warring sides and thus has force only in so far as each side is organised.⁴⁹

45. Vserossiiskaya tarifnaya konferentsiya soyuzov metallistov, Pg., 1918, pp. 136-7 (henceforward Tarifnaya konferentsiya).

46. ibid., p.137.

47. Rabochii Put', 26, 30 October 1917, p.4; Novyi Put', 1-2, 15 October 1917, p.15; Tarifnaya Konferentsiya, p.137.

48. Vestnik Metallista, 1, p.48.

49. Metallist, 1917, 1-2, p.6.

Three months later Shlyapnikov imputed such sectionalism to exclusive groups of craft workers in the industry:

There cannot be several unions in one enterprise - all trades must unite in one family...Every attempt by individual trades to use the 'right moment' to raise separate, particularist demands is inadmissible. The conscious layers of skilled metalworkers - fitters, turners, etc. - understand this beautifully, and refrain from any separate demands. The same position is taken by the very unfortunate, badly-paid chernorabochie. Despite the severity of their situation, separate demands by chernorabochie are rare. Particularism is apparent chiefly among small trades such as welders, who scarcely exceed a thousand people in the whole of Piter, also pattern-makers, stokers, draughtsmen, who constitute an extremely limited number, but who are imbued with prejudices to the effect that their own profession is qualitatively different from any other and that they cannot collaborate with others in the defence of their interests.⁵⁰

Shlyapnikov was here minimising the degree of opposition to the contract on the part of chernorabochie, for it was soon to become a thorn in the side of the new Bolshevik government.

In spite of the many problems involved in implementing the contract, it was in operation in the majority of factories by October. This was no mean achievement, given the intractability of the industrial crisis. Sectional opposition to the contract was basically a response to this crisis rather than evidence of strong, particularism or craft exclusiveness in the working class, and its importance should not be exaggerated. In the last analysis, the fact that the union was able to implement its contract among some 200,000 workers attests

50. Metallist, 5, 9 November 1917, p.2.

the fact that pressures towards class unity were stronger than those towards sectionalism.⁵¹

D. THE WAGE CONTRACTS: THEIR KEY FEATURES

A central aim of union policy in drawing up contracts was to reduce wage differentials in each industry. The printers' union was a pioneer in this respect. The printers' union was the first in Petrograd to draw up a collective wage contract in March, and, in effecting it, it fought hard against sectionalism within the print workforce. Printers had been unique among skilled workers in Petrograd in suffering a sharp decline in real wages during the war (by the end of 1916 they were 33% down on the 1913 level) and in suffering from unemployment.⁵² There was thus a considerable head of pressure behind economic demands in March. The union leaders determined to reduce wage differentials by raising the rates of unskilled printers by 90% to 100%, compared to an increase of 50% for skilled printers. This provoked opposition from a minority of type-setters, mainly those in state print works. They set up a liaison committee of state print works which tried to negotiate a separate wage contract, involving vast increases of 75r. to 80r. a month for the highly skilled, compared to 20r. to 30r. for the unskilled.⁵³

51. The degree of sectional opposition to the contracts was less in other industries, though it is evident among type-setters (egged on by Bolsheviks), journeymen weavers and among some leatherworkers. Tkach, 1, November 1917, p.31; Tikhanov, A., 'Rabochie-pechatniki v 1917G.', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, vol. 4, M., 1925, p.190; Golos Kozhevnika, 4-5, 1 December 1917, p.14.

52. Tikhanov, A., 'Rabochie-pechatniki v gody voyny', Materialy po istorii professional'nogo dvizheniya v Rossii, vol. 3, M., 1925, p.114.

53. Pechatnoe Delo, 4, 10 July 1917, pp. 7, 13.

One angry member of this committee wrote to the union journal lambasting it for "putting the wretched water-carrier's nag on a par with the drayman's fine mare".⁵⁴ The union rode the storm, but when it came to renegotiating the contract in June, opposition again burst forth. Debate raged in the pages of the union journal as to the virtues of a "levelling" tariff. K.P. Tik gave a classic defence of wage differentials, arguing that type-setters were not getting reward for their skills and were scarcely better off than 'bums' (khamy) who spent their time playing cards and getting drunk. A union spokesman delivered a vigorous counter-blast, enquiring why type-setters were so different from other skilled workers, and why unskilled workers should not also live decently.⁵⁵ The union was forced to make some concession to craft pressure, for the second wage contract increased differentials slightly.⁵⁶ Negotiation of this contract went less smoothly than in March, as the employers refused to backdate it to August 1. This caused the union to bring out twenty print works, employing 3,000 printers, in a well-organised strike in August.⁵⁷ The employers capitulated, but were condemned for doing so by the SFWO, and the new contract came into effect from September. The compromise contract, which moderated earlier demands for control of hiring and firing and longer holidays, provoked discontent among some rank-and-file printers, for example, at

54. Tikhanov, A., op. cit., vol. 4, p.166.

55. Pechatnoe Delo, 5, 22 July 1917, pp. 9-10.

56. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, Pg., 1919, pp. 52-3.

57. Pechatnoe Delo, 8, 1 September 1917, p.3; Delo Naroda, 118, 4 August 1917, p.4; Delo Naroda, 126, 13 August 1917, p.4.

the Kan print works and among envelope makers; the Bolsheviks did not fail to exploit ^{this}. In spite of this, it is not possible to accuse the union of giving into craft sectionalism. It successfully resisted pressure from the aristocratic sections of type-setters and pursued a strict class policy in its conduct of the wages struggle; it must have had the backing of most printers, since no less than 90% of them were members of the union by the summer - thus making them the most highly unionised of any group of industrial workers.⁵⁸

In the metal industry differentials increased during the war and by 1917 were larger than in any other industry, except the glass industry - where the very high earnings of an aristocratic elite of glass-blowers made for an especially wide differential between top and bottom earnings (see Table 17). The metal union tried to combat this trend by assigning larger percentage increases to the low-paid than to the higher-paid. They specifically repudiated the principle of an equal wage for all, however, though this principle won some support from chernorabochie in the autumn.⁵⁹ The huge diminution in differentials which came about in the metal industry between 1917 and 1918 was due less to union policy than to plummeting real wages. By the spring of 1918 money wages accounted for an ever-decreasing part of real income, much of which was now paid in kind. By April 1918 the metal union felt that levelling had gone far enough and between July and September it increased differentials from 1.39:1 to 1.75:1.⁶⁰

58. Tikhanov, op. cit., vol. 4, p.162.

59. Metallist, 1922, 12, p.42. See the speech by Konovalenko on behalf of the unskilled at the first national metalworkers' tariff conference on 17 October, Tarifnaya Konferentsiya, p.58.

60. Strumilin, Zarabotnaya Plata, pp. 35-6.

Table 17Wage Differentials among Factory Workers in Petrograd 1917-18

The daily wage of the highest-paid category of workers expressed
as a percentage of the daily wage of the lowest-paid category
(= 100)

Collective Wage Contract	% Difference				
	1 June 1917	1 Oct. 1917	1 Jan. 1918	1 April 1918	1 July 1918
<u>Textiles:</u>					
spinning & weaving	-	205.9	140.7	140.7	126.3
cloth-printing & dyeing	-	235.3	150.0	150.0	131.6
sewing	-	116.7	125.0	125.0	138.9
Paper-makers	-	194.4	194.4	157.7	138.9
Envelope-makers	220	216.7	160.0	160.0	138.9
Printers	212.5	250	250.0	250.0	187.5
Woodturners	-	216.7	244.4	173.1	130.6
Metalworkers	-	244.4	173.1	173.1	138.9
Glass-makers	333.3	333.3	192.1	192.3	138.9
Leatherworkers	209.7	173.9	173.9	156.5	138.9
Foodworkers	203.1	203.1	173.1	173.1	141.7
Tobacco-workers	160.0	200	200	200	184.2
Chemical workers	-	-	184.6	184.6	139.8

Source: Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, Pg., 1919, pp.22-3.

Another interesting aspect of contracts concerned their policy on piece rates. Piece rate systems had been the bane of workers' lives under the old order and after February workers clamoured to abolish them. Although all the wage contracts were drawn up on the basis of fixed hourly rates, not all of them ruled out piece rates however. The leatherworkers' union, for example, placed the demand for the total abolition of piece work to the fore of its campaign for a wage contract, but in July the Skorokhod shoe factory agreed to the restoration of piece rates, terminated in March, in return for management ratification of the rest of the contract.⁶¹ On 15 August the union announced that it had decided to accept the SFWO recommendation to revive piece rates throughout the industry.⁶² The woodturners' contract specified that piece rates should be determined jointly by the SFWO and the union.⁶³ The metalworkers' union included piece rates as part of the productivity package which they promised the SFWO. In early October a meeting of 217 members of factory rates commissions in the metal industry agreed that piece rates need not be a means of 'wringing sweat' from the workers.⁶⁴ However some union leaders, such as Ryazanov, considered piece rates to be the materialisation of the capitalist work ethic and profoundly inimical to socialism. There is no doubt that piece rates were a powerful factor disposing the SFWO to accept contracts. In early September the employers' newspaper opined:

61. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule i iyul'skii krizis, M., 1959, p.341.

62. Golos Kozhevnika, 4-5, p.21.

63. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 2, 19 October 1917, p.14.

64. Metallist, 4, 18 October 1917, pp. 8-9.

The other extremely important point in our collective wage contracts concerns the introduction of piece rates...against which the workers fought so energetically until recently. This is dictated by the necessity of raising labour productivity, which has fallen so low.⁶⁵

One of the most controversial aspects of the contracts was their productivity clauses. Employers were implacable in their insistence that in return for a guaranteed wage there should be guaranteed output. As we have seen, metal union leaders had to overcome strong opposition from rank-and-file delegates to get this principle accepted. In September the Provisional Central Committee of the national metalworkers' union ordered local branches to pay heed to productivity:

We must be sure that the organised masses bring into the new world which we are making a definite level of production, we must be confident that the working masses will enter the new system with a culture of production (proizvodstvennaya kul'tura) which will guarantee them from chaos under the new, free forms of economic management.⁶⁶

The establishment of these 'new, free forms' in practice was to show how difficult it was to avoid chaos. The chemical workers' contract included a productivity clause almost identical in wording to that of the metalworkers' contract.⁶⁷ The paperworkers' contract specified that norms of output should be agreed jointly by management and workers and that in case of non-fulfilment of norms, workers should receive only two-thirds the agreed rate.⁶⁸

65. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 195, 8 September 1917, p.2.

66. Metallist, 1922, 12, p.22.

67. Prof. Dvizh., pp. 164-5.

68. Pischebumazhnik, 2-3, 21 October 1917, p.19.

'Equal pay for equal work' was a phrase which figured in most contracts, but it is difficult to ascertain what it actually meant. The demand for equal pay was not one which figured much in the struggles of women workers prior to 1917.⁶⁹ The RSDLP, in contrast to the German SPD, did not include a demand for equal pay in the party programme.⁷⁰ This may have reflected the fact that very few Russian women did jobs identical to those of men. In 1917 women began to raise the demand, but the unions and factory committees did relatively little to back them. When the metalworkers' union drew up plans for a contract, a meeting of delegates from the Vyborg district warned the leadership not to forget equal pay.⁷¹ The contract included a clause on equal pay, but, significantly, the rates for unskilled women were lower than those for unskilled men. The same was true of the textile workers', printers', woodturners' and paperworkers' contracts and may have been true of the leatherworkers' and chemical workers' contracts, although both included equal pay clauses.⁷² The contracts thus did little to alter the relative pay and status of women workers, in spite of putative support for the principle of equal pay.

All contracts included clauses on working hours and most unions managed to 'legalise' the eight-hour working day in their contracts. Provisions for overtime and holidays were also specified. Already

69. Glickman, R.L., 'The Russian Factory Woman, 1880-1914', Women in Russia, ed., Atkinson, D., Dallin, A., and Lapidus, G., Stanford University Press, 1977.

70. Vtoroi S"ezd RSDRP, 1903, Protokoly, M., 1959, pp. 198-207; Thonnessen, op. cit., p.54.

71. Pravda, 77, 9 June 1917, p.4.

72. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 1, 20 May 1917, p.13; Tkach, 1, pp. 21-2; Delo Naroda, 172, 5 October 1917, p.4; Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 2, p.14; Prof. Dvizh., p.154.

the prospect of growing unemployment was a serious one and so unions tried to get employers to agree to redundancy terms and to payment for temporary stoppages. They were fairly successful in this. Less successful was the attempt to get employers to recognise the de facto control of hiring and firing that was in force; several unions, including the print union agreed to drop this demand in the course of negotiations.

It is difficult to evaluate the overall success of the contracts. In terms of their overriding objective, i.e. that of improving the material conditions of workers, they were a depressing failure, but this was due not to faults in the contracts themselves, but to spiralling inflation. In other respects, the contracts were not an overwhelming victory for labour against capital: they bore all the hallmarks of compromise, as is evidenced by reductions in the rates proposed by the unions, productivity clauses and piece rates. Nevertheless, workers made some real gains, both in wages and hours, holidays and even job security - no mean feat, when viewed against the background of accelerating economic chaos. The contracts were most significant, however, in that they overcame the situation of spring 1917 in which different groups of workers each fought for themselves and left the weakest to go to the wall. In spite of sectional opposition from some quarters, the contracts succeeded in overcoming variation in wages and, so far as it was possible, in strengthening the position of the weakest sections of the working class. Finally, the regulation of wages across whole industries, via centralised collective bargaining, marked a new stage in labour relations, not just in Russia, but internationally.

E. RELATIONS BETWEEN WORKERS AND SLUZHASHCHIE

The period between February and October 1917 saw a surge of organisation and militancy among white-collar workers in the factories. The February Revolution was crucial in severing some of the bonds which bound white-collar workers to management, and in encouraging them to form independent organisations of a trade-union type. In the honeymoon period of the revolution, i.e. in the months of March and April, clerical and technical personnel went to great lengths to repair relations with workers on the shop floor, to make a fresh start. This was exemplified in some factories by the desire of white-collar workers to be represented on the factory committees. In early March office-workers at the Triangle and Rosenkrantz works elected delegates to the works committees. At the Arsenal works a representative of the foremen sat on the committee.⁷³ At the Admiralty works white-collar workers were allowed four representatives on the committee, but in April it was reported that they were not attending meetings.⁷⁴ Generally speaking, white-collar workers set up their own committees independent of the workers' committees. At the Baltic works white-collar workers not only had a works committee but also committees in each shop.⁷⁵ Labour leaders made periodic pleas for manual and white-collar workers to unite their committees, but with only limited success. At the First Factory Committee Conference in June, Levin, an SR and organiser of

73. Baklanova, I.A., Rabochie Petrograda v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii, L., 1978, pp. 94-5.

74. Fab. zav. kom., p.36, 57.

75. ibid., p.344.

the conference, called on factory committees to embrace clerical and technical personnel.⁷⁶ At the Tentelevskii chemical works on 1 August workers and salaried employees did agree to dissolve their separate committees.⁷⁷ At the Triangle works the three committees of manual, clerical and technical staff formed a joint executive in September.⁷⁸ At the beginning of October committees of workers and salaried employees in factories under the Naval Department amalgamated. Yet these were not typical. In most, though by no means all, factories in the capital, manual and white-collar workers continued to have separate organisations at enterprise level.

The growth of trade unionism among sluzhashchie was remarkable, in view of their lack of organisation under the old order. In the spring and summer of 1917 about thirty unions of sluzhashchie sprang to life in Petrograd, which, by a process of fusion, decreased in number to around fifteen by October. White-collar workers in factories were organised into a number of different unions. Some were members of the largest union of sluzhashchie, the union of commercial and industrial employees (soyuz torgovo-promyshlennykh sluzhashchikh), which by October had about 26,000 members. Most of its members were shopworkers, however, which meant that many clerical and technical staff felt unhappy about joining this union ("What has an office-worker in common with a sausage-maker?" being a prevalent attitude).⁷⁹ In addition, the union had a strong Bolshevik leader-

76. Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkomy, vol. I, p.117.

77. ibid., p.260.

78. Stepanov, op. cit., p.111.

79. Bor'ba, 1917, 1, pp. 7-9.

ship, which alienated some white-collar workers and encouraged a group of Mensheviks to form a break-away 'union of factory sluzhashchie', which had a very limited success in the Petrograd and Vasilevskii districts of the capital.⁸⁰ The largest of the solely white-collar unions was the union of clerical workers (soyuz lits zanimaynshchikhsya kontorskim trudem) which, by October, had a membership of around 20,000 and included many workers in factory offices.⁸¹ The union of factory foremen and technicians had about 6,000 members in October and the union of draughtsmen about 2,000. A small union of accountants also existed.⁸² Yet in the first half of 1917, none of these unions can really be said to have represented white-collar workers in the factories. Instead, they were represented by a curious hybrid organisation which was part trade union and part factory committee.

The Central Council of Starosty of Factory Sluzhashchie (CCSFS) was founded on 24 March and consisted of stewards elected by white-collar workers in each factory. By May white-collar workers in over 200 factories were affiliated to the CCSFS, which aspired to represent sluzhashchie both inside and outside industry, but in practice represented mainly sluzhashchie in industry, since those in commercial

80. Antoshkin, D., Ocherk dvizheniya sluzhashchikh v Rossii, M., 1921, p.70.

81. Prof. Dvizh., pp. 346-7.

82. ibid., pp. 347, 349. The political complexion of the unions of sluzhashchie was more diverse than that of manual trade unions. At the first national congress of white-collar unions in July 1917, representing 103 unions and 29 mutual aid societies, delegates included 66 Mensheviks, 50 SR's, 24 Bolsheviks, 16 Popular Socialists, 14 Bundists, 13 Jewish Socialists, 3 Trudoviks, 8 Plekhanovites, 4 Kadets and 11 non-party. Volin, op. cit., p.27.

and governmental institutions tended to organise through their different unions. The CCSFS was the first organisation of white-collar workers to pursue a militant economic policy. Its leaders, the Menshevik-Defencist, Novakovskii, and the Menshevik (but one-time Bolshevik) Yakovlev formulated a series of radical demands at the beginning of April, for a six-hour working day, wage increases, a minimum wage of 150r. a month, equal pay for women, overtime at time-and-a-half, recognition of the committees of sluzhaschie and control of hiring and firing.⁸³ These demands were put to the SFWO, which took exception to the demands for a six-hour day and equal pay. After abortive negotiation, the CCSFS resolved on 16 May to call a strike.⁸⁴ It called on the support of the factory committees and of all white-collar workers. While most white-collar unions agreed to support the strike in principle, they made little effort to organise practical support. The union of foremen and technicians, for example, left it up to each factory to decide whether or not to go on strike.⁸⁵ In the event the strike was averted by the intervention of Grozdev at the Ministry of Labour, who persuaded the SFWO at the end of May to agree to wage rises and the six-hour day, although they would not concede the right to control hiring and firing.⁸⁶ Having achieved a partial victory, the CCSFS rapidly went into decline. It had been held together mainly by the duumvirate of Novakovskii and Yakovlev and when both went to work in the Ministry of Labour, the CCSFS fell apart. By October the rocketing cost of living was causing individual strikes of white-collar workers

83. Delo Naroda, 55, 19 May 1917, p.4.

84. Revolutsiya 1917g: Khronika sobytii, vol. 2 (aprel'-mai) ed. Avdeev, N., M.L., 1923, pp. 173-4; 180.

85. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 4, 7 November 1917, p.12.

86. Delo Naroda, 125, 12 August 1917, p.1.

of the Nevskii shipyard, Tudor, Aivaz and Ippolitov works, but neither the CCSFS nor the clerical workers' union offered much in the way of leadership.⁸⁷

It is difficult to generalise about the extent to which workers and sluzhashchie supported one another in their struggles. At the Putilov works on 2 June the works committee supported the demands raised by the CCSFS, but warned white-collar workers at the factory from taking any partial action pending the outcome of the Ministry of Labour's arbitration.⁸⁸ A couple of weeks later clerical and technical personnel voted not to take joint action with the workers in support of the metalworkers' tariff, arguing that this would be a "stab in the back to organised revolutionary democracy and to our valiant revolutionary army which has shed its blood for free Russia". At the Putilov shipyard white-collar workers applauded the June Offensive and expressed admiration for Kerensky.⁸⁹ On 19 July a general meeting of clerical workers went on strike because they objected to a bonus system negotiated by the office-workers' union. Over half of the clerical staff were still earning a paltry 80r. to 160r. a month at this time. The works committee condemned the strike as a 'disorganising' move, but the attempt to continue normal working whilst the clerical staff were on strike, caused disagreement on the committee. Some members felt that moral support should be given to the strikers, whilst others considered it reprehensible. Apparently, there was little sympathy for the clerical staff on the

87. Kontorskii Trud, 2, November 1917, p.12.

88. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 446-7.

89. Gaza ii, op. cit., p.106.

shop floor, and the strikers sought the support of neither the shop floor nor the works committee. Several members of the works committee accused the clerical staff of seeking to set up an 'office republic', of flaunting class principles and of philistine, petit-bourgeois attitudes. The sanguinary Bolshevik, Evdokimov, was all for dispersing the strikers at gun-point: "Let a thousand perish, for 40,000 will be saved", but other Bolsheviks on the committee took a less inflammatory line. A resolution was passed by 14 votes to 1, with three abstentions, calling on the clerical staff to end their strike, since it was doomed to failure and ^{would} merely encourage similar sectional strikes by other groups of workers.⁹⁰

A couple of weeks later, after the clerical workers' strike had collapsed, the works committee at Putilov felt it incumbent to issue a declaration to the workers, warning, amongst other things, against:

the erroneous view that people not engaged in physical labour are not to be tolerated, that they are basically drones and parasites. Comrades who argue thus lose sight of the crucial fact that in industry, in technical production, mental labour is as indispensable as physical labour.⁹¹

This prejudice towards white-collar workers was linked to a prevalent attitude within the working class which regarded only manual labour as authentic work, conferring dignity and moral worth on the worker.

90. Fab. zav. kom., p.460-4.

91. Rabochii kontrol', p.138.

At the Baltic works the factory committee agreed on 31 May to back the demands of the CCSFS for a six-hour day and a month's holiday, but asked to know which employees would be affected.⁹² A month later, when white-collar workers began to unilaterally implement a six-hour day, there were protests from the shop floor, so the works committee called on the employees to wait until the text of the agreement between the CCSFS and the SFWO was published.⁹³ On July 27 the works committee expressed concern at the effect on production of the six-hour day worked by accounts department staff.⁹⁴ Relations between the works committee and sluzhashchie appear to have been rather strained.

At the Skorokhod shoe factory relations were better. From the first, junior employees cooperated closely with workers, and after the factory committee supported the CCSFS struggle, senior employees also swung towards the workers. On May 18 they published a declaration which announced:

We, the sluzhashchie of Skorokhod, do not regard ourselves as sluzhashchie, but as mental workers, and we will go hand in hand with our worker-comrades in other occupations.⁹⁵

The practical support given to the sluzhashchie by workers at Skorokhod, Petichev cable works and elsewhere in their wage campaign alarmed the SFWO.⁹⁶ In September it called on the government to ban

92. Fab. zav. kom., p.250.

93. ibid., p.284.

94. ibid., p.305.

95. Istoriya obuvnoi fabriki 'Skorokhod', L., 1969, pp. 161-2.

96. Rabochii Kontrol', p.72.

joint committees of workers and sluzhashchie, but with no success.

On the whole, relations between mental and manual workers appear to have been fairly tense: instances of cooperation between the two sides being outnumbered by instances of outright antagonism. The general situation seems to have been accurately summed up by a draughtsman in September 1917:

In the majority of factories, the workers have their own organisation and the sluzhashchie theirs; each side keeps to itself and decides things for itself...there is no common understanding, but mutual disregard and animosity... There have been cases where workers have protested against the six-hour day and holidays, and sluzhashchie, in their turn, have blamed workers for not accepting the system of grades and for exploiting the present situation in order to achieve absurd wage increases.⁹⁷

97. Golos Chertezhnika, 3, 1 October 1917, p.5.

7. THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF WORKERS' CONTROL OF PRODUCTION

A. THE THEORY OF WORKERS' CONTROL

The whole subject of workers' control in the Russian Revolution is awash in confusion. There is not even an agreed theoretical definition of what constitutes 'workers' control of production'. Precisely what kinds of activities should we conceive as 'workers' control'? Can all the activities of the factory committees - which included struggles for higher wages, shorter hours and for the organisation of food supplies - be seen as part of workers' control? Soviet historians, such as V.I. Selitskii and M.L. Itkin, answer in the affirmative.¹ Yet if one sees workers' control as operating on the terrain of struggles over the "appropriation of nature", as argued in the introduction, then it becomes obvious that not all factory committee activities can be subsumed into the category of workers' control. Z.V. Stepanov is correct to define as workers' control only those "measures, implemented by proletarian organisations, and linked directly to intervention in the productive and commercial activity of the industrial enterprise, to the organisation of multilateral accounting and to control of the whole of production."² It is difficult to go beyond this rather vague definition.

1. Selitskii, V.I., 'Nekotorye voprosy bor'by petrogradskikh rabochikh za kontrol' nad proizvodstvom v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii', Istoriya rabocheho klassa Leningrada, issue 2, L., 1963 and Itkin, M.L., 'Nekotorye funktsii rabocheho kontrolya v period podgotvki vooruzhennogo vosstaniya', Rabochii klass i rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v 1917g., M., 1964.
2. Stepanov, Z.V., 'K voprosu o rabochem kontrole nad proizvodstvom i raspredeleniem', Istoriya SSSR, 1968, 4, pp. 225-8. For further discussion of this problem see Ignatenko, T.A., Sovetskaya istoriografiya rabocheho kontrolya i natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti v SSSR, 1917-67gg., M., 1971, pp. 203-5.

'Workers' control¹ is not a concept which can be determined with great theoretical rigour, for in historical reality workers' control took a plurality of forms and changed radically in character within a short space of time. Not all the forms of workers' control fit neatly into the category of struggles around "the appropriation of nature", but the advantage of this definition is that it excludes from analysis the important struggles around wages, hours and unemployment which were taking place, and orients us towards examining the various struggles at the point of production i.e. around the labour process and the social organisation of production in the enterprise. However theory can take us no further, for under the impact of revolutionary events workers' control soon ceased merely to operate in the sphere of "appropriation of nature" and spilt over into a struggle for the abolition of the capitalist system itself.

The second problem of a theoretical nature relates to whether the struggle for workers' control is an 'economic' or 'political' struggle. In What Is To Be Done? (1902),³ Lenin had argued that there is a clear disjunction between the spontaneous 'economic' struggles, which generate "trade union consciousness", and political struggles, which are based on Social Democratic ideology introduced "from outside". Soviet historians have wracked their brains trying to decide whether or not the struggle for workers' control is 'economic' or 'political'. In faithfulness to orthodoxy, they conclude that

3. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 6, M., 1959.

the movement was essentially economic, but politicised by the "outside" intervention of the Bolshevik party. Western historians appear to be divided on the question. Paul Avrich sees the movement for workers' control as essentially political, but sees its politics as syndicalist rather than Bolshevik.⁴ William Rosenberg writes: "the movement for workers' control throughout the period was primarily a struggle for economic security and material betterment rather than a political movement".⁵ A cursory glance at the factory committees, however, shows that whilst the initial impulse behind workers' control may have been 'economic', it engaged with politics from the first. In fact the theoretical argument in the introduction shows the inadequacy of Lenin's economics/politics dichotomy. Lenin may have been right to argue that 'economic' struggles can only generate "trade union consciousness", since they do not challenge the status of labour as a commodity and express the reality of class society rather than challenge it, but he is talking only of struggles around the "appropriation of the product". He overlooks an entire realm of 'economic' struggle over the "appropriation of nature". It is in this realm that the movement for workers' control is initially located. This helps explain the peculiar fusion of economic and political elements in that movement, and the fact that it cannot be reduced to one or the other.

Although theoretical confusion abounds in discussions of workers' control, historical interpretation of workers' control in

4. Avrich, P., The Russian Revolution and the Factory Committees, Columbia University Ph.D., 1962, ch.2.

5. Rosenberg, W., 'Workers and Workers' Control in the Russian Revolution', History Workshop, 5, Spring 1978, p.92.

Russia in the West is remarkably consistent. Most Western historians portray the movement for workers' control as a syndicalist movement which sought to oust the bosses and allow the workers to run the factories themselves. Paul Avrich sees the working class as inspired by a kind of chiliastic syndicalism. "As the workers' committees acquired a greater measure of power in the factories and mines, the vision of a proletarian paradise seemed to grow more distinct and the labouring masses (became) impatient to enter their 'golden age'".⁶ In practice, according to Avrich, "the factory committees (contributed) to a form of 'productive anarchy' that might have caused Marx to shudder in his grave".⁷ Employers desperately tried to erect a break-water against "the syndicalist tide (that) was carrying Russia to the brink of economic collapse",⁸ but to no avail. In the same vein, John Keep discusses the meaning of workers' control: "There is little doubt that the majority of delegates (at the First All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees - SAS) took this slogan in its literal sense, as meaning a real transfer of power within the enterprise to the men's chosen representatives, who were to exercise the functions of management in the interests of their electors. Needless to add, they showed no concern whatever for the effects which the full 'democratisation' of industrial relations would be bound to have on productivity and the national economy as a whole".⁹ Frederick Kaplan goes even further and asserts

6. Avrich, op. cit., pp. 92-3. Avrich is the leading historian of workers' control in the West. As well as his Ph.D. thesis, see The Russian Anarchists, Princeton 1971; 'The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control', Slavic Review, vol. 22, no. 1, March 1963 and 'The Russian Factory Committees in 1917', Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, vol. 2, 1963.

7. Avrich, Ph.D. thesis, p.110.

8. Avrich, Slavic Review, vol. 22, no. 1, 1963, p.54.

9. Keep, J.H.L., The Russian Revolution: a study in mass mobilisation, 89.

categorically that workers actually took over the factories:

"...it becomes clear that the workers conceived of control as ownership. Having seized the factories, the workers instituted 'a type of cooperative association, a shareholding workers' society', in which all the workers and employees of a particular factory owned a portion of the enterprise and shared in the profits".¹⁰

It will be argued that this dominant interpretation fundamentally misreads the reality of workers' control in Petrograd, where the movement was most developed. Whilst it would be idle to deny that there were syndicalist elements within the movement or that there were instances of workers taking over their factories or of factory committees exacerbating economic chaos, to put these phenomena at the centre of one's picture is to gravely distort the history of the factory committees and their efforts to control the economy. We shall begin this critique, firstly, by briefly examining the extent of syndicalist and anarchist influence in the Petrograd labour movement prior to October. We shall then go on to examine the practice of workers' control in its initial stages, before going on finally to survey the political debates about workers' control of production.

B. ANARCHISM, SYNDICALISM AND THE PETROGRAD LABOUR MOVEMENT

In their interpretation of the movement for workers' control of production Western historians follow the lead of syndicalists and anarchists, such as G. Maksimov and A. Berkman, who argued in their

10. Kaplan, F.I., Bolshevik Ideology and the Ethics of Soviet Labor, London 1976, p.89.

histories of the Russian Revolution that anarchists and syndicalists exerted an influence on the revolutionary movement out of all proportion to their numbers. Maksimov, who for a short time was a member of the Petrograd Central Council of Factory Committees, argues that the factory committee movement was under the sway of anarcho-syndicalist ideology and sought to make the factories into producer and consumer communes.¹¹ Other anarchists, however, equally involved in the events of 1917, take a very different view. Volin, who became editor of the first anarcho-syndicalist newspaper in Petrograd (Golos Truda), on his return from the United States in the summer of 1917, reports that "the anarchists were only a handful of individuals without influence" and recalls with shocked surprise that "in the fifth month of a great revolution, no anarchist newspaper, no anarchist voice was making itself heard in the capital of the country. And that in the face of the almost unlimited activity of the Bolsheviks!"¹² As late as November 1917 an anarchist periodical in Petrograd reported that: "up to now anarchism has had an extremely limited influence on the masses, its forces are weak and insignificant, the idea itself is subject to corruption and distortion".¹³ Whose testimony is one to believe?

11. Maximoff, G.P., Syndicalists in the Russian Revolution (re-printed to celebrate Essex Libertarian Conference, 1978).

12. Voline, The Unknown Revolution, 1917-21, Chicago, 1974, pp. 183, 185.

13. Golos anarkhista, 1, 21 November 1917. An anarchist Gorelik wrote that "anarchist workers were too weak in ideas and numbers to have much effect", cited by Komin, V.V., Anarkhizm v Rossii, Kalinin, 1969, p.145.

True to its philosophy perhaps, anarchism, as an organised political force, was extremely weak in Russia.¹⁴ By the time of the February Revolution, there were only about 200 active members of anarchist organisations, though by the end of 1917 there were 33 anarchist groups and 21 papers and journals in Russia.¹⁵ In Petrograd anarchist groups were revived in the Vyborg, Narva and Moscow districts during the war, but they were tiny in numbers and comprised deserters from the army, bohemians, criminals and a sprinkling of workers. In Petrograd in 1917-18 there were two main tendencies within the anarchist movement. The strongest was an anarcho-communist tendency, whose ideology derived from Kropotkin, and a much less influential anarcho-syndicalist tendency. Both were small in numbers and had few organisational resources.

In the course of 1917 the rising tide of economic chaos combined with governmental inertia to strengthen the political and emotional appeal of anarchism among some layers of workers, and especially among sailors and soldiers. There was much admiration of anarchist bravado in organising armed actions, such as the seizure of the print works of the right-wing newspaper, Russkaya Volya on 5 June, and the raid on the Kresty jail two weeks later, led by the anarchist

14. One should note that in Spain the success of anarchism derived entirely from its organisational strength. In Andalusia in the last third of the 19th century the anarchists successfully merged trade-union organisation with communal organisation in order to pit the power of the pueblo against the latifundists and wine-growing bourgeoisie. After the First World War the anarcho-syndicalist CNT owed its success largely to organisational flexibility, linked to strategic perspicuity. See Kaplan, T., 'The Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903', Princeton University Press, 1977; Romero Maura, J., 'The Spanish Case', in Anarchism Today, eds. Joll, J. and Apter, D., London: Macmillan, 1971.

15. Kanev, S.N., Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya i Krakh anarkhizma, M., 1974, p.54.

Zhuk. Around this time, too, the expulsion by the government of anarchists from the Durnovo villa fostered sympathy for the anarchist cause - one of the contributing factors behind the July Days explosion.¹⁶ In general, simple slogans, such as 'Rob the robbers!' or 'Exterminate the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on!' were the source of anarchism's appeal to desperate and frustrated workers. Only rarely did anarchists try to put across their ideas in a more developed coherent form.¹⁷ Simple anarchism tended to appeal to some of the same workers as were attracted to the Bolsheviks, but whereas the official policy of the Bolsheviks was to divert the anger and frustration of these workers into organised channels, anarchists were generally content to fuel this anger, with the aim of triggering off a popular explosion which would blow apart the Kerensky Government and the capitalist system.¹⁸ At the end of June and again in October the Bolsheviks almost lost the support of these groups of discontented workers, because of their policy of caution and restraint, and it was partly the danger of losing them to the anarchists which convinced Lenin that a seizure of power was unpostponable. However, the appeal of anarchism to Petrograd workers should not be exaggerated: it was essentially a minority appeal, and the anarchists never succeeded in organising the working-class support which they had.

16. ibid., p.73.

17. Gorev, B.I., Anarkhizm v Rossii, M., 1930, p.124.

18. This was not true of anarcho-syndicalists. At the Izhorsk works they 'took every measure to ensure that actions by workers have an organised and not a partial character'. Golos Truda, 20, 25 November 1917, p.4.

At factory level the anarchists had few functioning cells, the main ones being at the Metal Works, Pipe Works, Putilov, Aivaz and Izhorsk.¹⁹ These cells seldom succeeded in persuading workers to vote for anarchist or syndicalist resolutions and made only sporadic efforts at fund-raising. The number of anarchists elected to factory committees or trade unions was very small, though^{this} may partly reflect a principled refusal to take part in elections, which for some anarchists, represented the tyranny of the majority over the minority. At the conferences of Petrograd factory committees anarchists were in a small minority. At the first conference in May, Zhuk, the chairman of the Schlüsselburg works committee, presented a moderate anarchist resolution which gained 45 votes, compared to the 290 votes cast for the Bolshevik resolution.²⁰ At the first national conference of factory committees in October an anarchist resolution gained five votes against the 65 gained by the Bolshevik resolution.²¹ Nevertheless at this same conference Milyutin, the Bolshevik spokesman, found it necessary to explicitly refute the anarchist notion of workers taking over the factories—which suggests that at factory level anarchist influence may have been strong enough to worry the Bolsheviks.²² One Menshevik source claims that 18,000 workers voted for anarchist candidates in factory committee elections in Petrograd in October, which suggests that anarchist

19. See Golos Truda and Kommuna passim and Pervyi legal'nyi Komitet PK RSDRP(b) v 1917g., M.L., 1927, pp. 175-6 and 186.

20. Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Fabzavkomy, vol. 1, M., 1927, pp. 70-1 (henceforward Okt. Rev. i Fab.).

21. ibid., vol. 2, p.186.

22. ibid., p.184.

influence was on the increase. But it is not clear what elections are being referred to, nor is it clear what, precisely, a vote for an anarchist candidate meant.²³ Whilst there is evidence to suggest that anarchist influence was on the increase in the autumn of 1917, there is none to suggest that they were gaining hegemony in the factory committee movement. Anarchist conceptions had only minority support. Volin defines the 'Anarchist idea' as:

to transform the economic and social bases of society, without having recourse to a political state, to a government or to a dictatorship of any sort. That is, to achieve the Revolution and resolve its problems not by political or statist means, but by means of natural and free activity, economic and social, of the associations of the workers themselves, after having overthrown the last capitalist government.²⁴

There is no evidence that this was the aspiration of any but a handful in the Petrograd labour movement. As William Rosenberg commented recently, "it would appear that the overwhelming mass of Russian workers lacked this (i.e. syndicalist) outlook, as well as organisations, literature and activists anxious to cultivate it".²⁵ In what follows it is hoped to demonstrate that the movement for workers' control, far from aiming at an anarchist utopia, based on factory communes, was, in its initial stages at least, concerned with the far more practical aim of limiting economic disruption, maintaining production and preserving jobs.

23. Novaya Zhizn', 6 January 1918, p.4.

24. Voline, op. cit., p.175.

25. Rosenberg, op. cit., p.95.

C. WORKERS' CONTROL AS A RESPONSE TO ECONOMIC CHAOS

The revolutionary process of 1917 cannot be understood except against a background of growing economic chaos. Western historians have been so mesmerised by the astonishing political developments of this annus mirabilis, that they have overlooked the economic crisis which underpinned the crisis in politics and have tended not to see how the struggle for elementary economic and social needs provided the driving force behind the politicisation of the masses. As early as 1916, there were alarming signs that Russia was heading towards a grave economic crisis, but it was not until the summer of 1917 that the crisis fully began to manifest itself. The chief symptoms of the crisis at this stage were severe shortages of food, raw materials and fuel - particularly acute in Petrograd because it was isolated on the Western seaboard of the vast Empire, far away from where these things were produced. From the outbreak of the war, the Donbass was the chief source of coal for Russian industry, but the excessive strain placed on the Donbass mines led to a drop in production from 2.57 million tonnes in January 1917 to 2.15 million in May.²⁶ Iron and steel production fell from 4.04 million tonnes in 1916 to 2.55 million in 1917, and pig iron production from 4.63 million tonnes to 3.12 million in the same period.²⁷ More critically, the fuel and raw materials which were produced no longer reached the centres of industrial production, owing to the

26. Selitskii, V.I., Massy v bor'be za rabochii Kontrol', M., 1971, p.91.

27. Gaponenko, L.S., Rabochii klass Rossii v 1917g., M., 1970, p.449.

paralysis of the transport system. During the first seven months of 1917, 16 million tonnes less was carried in freight on the railways than during the same period in the previous year.²⁸ The shortages of fuel and raw materials led to a decline in output of manufactured goods in Russia of 40% by September,²⁹ a decline which was aggravated by other factors. Firstly, the Provisional Government had accumulated a colossal debt of 60,000 million rubles more during its term of office than during the whole 32-month period prior to February.³⁰ The result was spiralling inflation leading to ever greater wage demands and a slump in investment (in spite of the trebling of profit levels of the big monopolies during the war). Secondly, the fall in labour productivity, caused mainly by the deterioration in diet, combined with worn-out machinery and technical disorganisation to further depress output. Thirdly, the heightened tempo of class struggle, together with the imminent likelihood of the run-down of all war industries, made industrialists reluctant to maintain production. Employers now faced the stark possibility of bankruptcy or closure, whilst workers faced the dire prospect of starvation and mass unemployment.

The policy of workers' control of production was first and foremost an attempt by factory committees to stem the tide of industrial chaos. Throughout its brief life, but especially in its infancy, the workers' control movement made a valiant attempt to maintain production amid mounting economic anarchy. The impulse behind the movement, far from being ideological, was initially practical.

28. Trud., 2-3, September 1917, p.11.

29. Gaponenko, op. cit., p.225.

30. Volobuev, V.P., Proletariat i burzhuziia Rossii v 1917g., M., 1964, p.217.

Opening the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees on 30 May, the Socialist Revolutionary, V.M. Levin, had this to say:

All the works and factories of Petrograd are experiencing a crisis, but management do not display any activism in supplying their factories with a sufficient quantity of raw materials and fuels. As a result, workers may be thrown to the mercy of Tsar Hunger, unemployed. Therefore, it is the workers themselves who must show activism in this sphere, since the industrialist-employers are not showing any. Only the unified organisation of factory committees, not only in Petrograd but throughout Russia, can do this. It is obvious that to do this, there must everywhere exist workers' organisations which must band together to intervene in industrial life in an organised manner.³¹

The Conference went on to discuss the state of industry in Petrograd; control and regulation of production and the flow of production in the factories; the tasks of the factory committees; unemployment and the demobilisation of industry;³² the role of the factory committees in the trade union movement; their relation to labour exchanges and cooperatives and, finally, the creation of a unified economic centre, attached to the Central Bureau of Trade Unions. The Second Conference of Factory Committees (7-12 August) reflected the same practical economic concerns, though it also discussed politics. On its agenda were three key questions: firstly, the economic state of the enterprise (fuel, raw materials, food supplies and the state of production); secondly, the current conjuncture and the tasks of workers' control; thirdly, unemployment, the evacuation of the factories and the demobilisation of industry.

31. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. I, p.82.

32. ibid., p.161.

Historians such as Kaplan argue that what was said at factory committee conferences was one thing, but that what was done by the factory committees in the enterprise was quite another. Yet in the majority of factories the key concern of the committees in the early stages was to keep production going, rather than to establish workers' self-management. On 8 November the factory committee at the Franco-Russian engineering works sent a letter to the company which began: "Production and the normal life of the factory are the chief work and concern of the committees".³³ And the works committee at the Sestroretsk armaments plant claimed: "Since the first days of our work we have stood by the view that our main aim is the task of maintaining production in the factory come what may...".³⁴ In order to establish the fact that for most factory committees workers' control was a question of survival rather than of utopian aspiration, it is worth looking in detail at the two areas in which factory committees first exercised "control", viz. the utilisation of fuel and the utilisation of raw materials.

The fuel shortage affected all industrial establishments in Petrograd, but large factories were particularly hard-hit. Both the Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees in August and the First All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees in October discussed the critical fuel situation after reports delivered by professional economists; but it was at the grass-roots that the most

33. Natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti i organizatsiya sotsialisticheskogo proizvodstva v Petrograde, 1917-20gg., vol. I, L., 1958, p.34.

34. ibid., p.266. See too the long report sent by the Copper-Rolling works committee to the CCFC on its activities, all of which were orientated towards upholding production. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie nakanune oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M., 1962, pp. 286-7.

active work went on. As early as March and April factory committees at the Vulkan and Putilov works began to search out fuel supplies.³⁵ At the Nevskii shipyard management protested at the officious way in which the factory committee monitored production, and on 10 May it informed the factory committee that unless it could find fresh supplies of oil, then certain shops would have to close. The factory committee agreed to try to find fuel in order to avert closure.³⁶ From early summer onwards factory committees at the Pipe Works, the Arsenal, Rozenkrantz and elsewhere began to send 'pushers' (tolkachi) to the Donbass and other parts of Southern Russia in search of fuel.³⁷ At the Putilov works the fuel shortage was especially acute and the works committee set up a fuel commission which sent 'pushers' to the coal and oil-producing areas, but they came back empty-handed, and by autumn output at the factory had slumped to a third of its normal level. The works committee thereupon created a technical commission to effect the transfer of the metal furnaces from mineral fuel to firewood. On 20 October the committee wrote to the Special Commission on Defence, requesting information on fuel supplies in Petrograd and offering to take care of deliveries, but the Commission could offer them little.³⁸ The Central Council of Factory Committees announced that it would requisition fuel from any factories which had more than three months supply in order to give it to power stations, water works and flour mills where it was most needed.³⁹

35. Selitskii, Massy op. cit., p.42.

36. Payalin, N.P., Zavod im Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1933, pp. 378-9.

37. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, pp. 114-5

38. Miteľman, M.I., 1917 god na Putilovskom zavode, L., 1939, p.141.

39. Novyi Put', 3-4, 1 December 1917, p.25.

The shortage of raw materials in Petrograd factories became serious in the late summer. On 21 July the committee of the New Admiralty works reported that although the factory had orders up to January 1918, it had only one month's supply of cast iron left. At the Aivas works at the beginning of September, 300 machines were standing idle because of shortages of non-ferrous metals and alloys.⁴⁰ By this time, most factory committees were busily monitoring stocks of raw materials and incoming and outgoing supplies. In April the Cartridge Works Factory committee requested a weigh-scale to check materials coming into the factory.⁴¹ On 7 April a general meeting at the Kebke tarpaulin factory agreed to investigate why management was removing canvas from the factory.⁴² At the Paramonov leather works the committee set up control of all goods coming in and out of the factory.⁴³ At the Petrograd carriage-construction company on 8 April the committee forbade management to remove deal boards from the premises.⁴⁴ At Rozenkrantz management denied that it had any spare materials when asked by the War Industries Committee, but on 14 July the works committee discovered 4,000 puds of metal which it offered to factories standing idle.⁴⁵

By summer, factory committees were trying to share what little fuel and raw materials there were. The Central Council of Factory

40. Stepanov, op. cit., p.115.

41. Selitskii, Massy, op. cit., p.43.

42. Rabochii kontrol' i natsionalizatsiya promyshlennykh predpriyatii, vol. 1, L., 1947, p.57 (henceforward Rabochii kontrol').

43. ibid., p.43.

44. Krasnyi Arkhiv, 103, 1940, p.108.

45. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule, M., 1959, p.352.

Committees took part in the various supply committees of the government in order to get information on the state of stocks and to ensure equitable distribution.⁴⁶ It was thus able to help factory committees share out materials. At the Brenner works the works committee was refused a loan by the Ministry of Labour to buy raw materials and turned to the shop stewards' committee at Triangle Works, who agreed to loan the committee 15,000 rubles from its strike fund; the Putilov works committee also donated some spare materials.⁴⁷ The workers' committee at Rozenkrantz donated some brass to the Baranovskii and Ekval' factories and at Sestroretsk works the committee received some self-hardening steel from Putilov.⁴⁸ Factory committees by the autumn were on guard against covert attempts by management to sabotage production. For while factories were being forced to close because of metal shortages, the administrations at the Duflon works, the Markov box factory and the Nevskii wood and metal-processing factory were selling off stocks of metal at exorbitant prices, with a view to closing down operations. They were stopped by their respective factory committees.⁴⁹ The workers' committee at the Brusnitsyn factory publicised a decision of the Chief Committee for the Leather Trade to send elsewhere leather which was needed in Petrograd. At the Bezdek sweet factory the committee on 17 September reported its boss to the authorities for speculative selling of sugar.⁵⁰

The activities of the factory committees in 'controlling' fuel and raw materials in the enterprise were dictated by the practical

46. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 2, pp. 76-80.

47. Trudorezina, 15, 29 July 1917, p.1.

48. Stepanov, op. cit., p.116.

49. ibid.

50. ib.d. p. 117.

need to maintain production rather than by any syndicalist desire to take over the enterprise. Workers' control of production throughout its brief life in the period 1917-1918 remained fundamentally concerned with minimising economic disorder and preserving jobs. However as the economic crisis deepened and as class struggle intensified, the forms of workers' control became ever more ambitious and the movement as a whole became more revolutionary and contestatory. Broadly speaking, in the eight-month period between the February and October Revolutions, workers' control went from being reactive, defensive and observational to being proactive, offensive and interventionist. From being concerned essentially to supervise production, workers' control developed into an attempt to actively intervene in production and drastically limit the authority of capital. It is difficult to periodise this trajectory precisely, for the tempo at which individual factories moved towards a more active, aggressive style of workers' control varied according to the specific conditions of each factory, but, crudely speaking, workers' control in Petrograd developed through four phases in the period February to October, each linked to the different economic and political conjunctures of the revolutionary process.

In the first period of March to April, which we have already examined, workers' control of production was confined mainly, though not exclusively, to state enterprises. Factory committees everywhere attempted to establish some control of hiring and firing, as part of a broader drive to democratise factory relations. Employers were optimistic about the future and prepared to make concessions. In the second phase, from May to June, most factory

committees began to monitor supplies of raw materials and fuel and to check that their factories were being run efficiently. It was in this period that the Bolsheviks achieved political hegemony within the movement. In the third phase, from July to August, economic crisis erupted and class struggle deepened. Employers went into the offensive and attempted to curb the powers of the factory committees, which were intervening in production on a large scale, challenging management authority, checking financial accounts, etc. In the fourth period, from September to October, these developments were strengthened. There was a severe economic and political crisis and polarised class conflict. Some employers tried to close their factories and a few factory committees completely took over the running of their enterprises. Factory committees became actively involved in the battle to transfer power to the Soviets, and workers' control, as a response to economic difficulties, began to mesh with the earlier impulses to democratise factory life, in order to produce a movement groping towards workers' self-management.

D. CENTRALISATION OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEE MOVEMENT

Western historians have placed considerable emphasis on the local, decentralised aspect of the factory committee movement, but their depiction of a diffuse, centrifugal movement, harnessed after October into centralist channels, is in need of qualification. For whilst the committees were characterised by greater decentralisation and local autonomy than the trade unions, from the first

there were pressures towards centralisation and higher-level coordination within the movement. Centralisation was not imposed from above by a triumphant Bolshevik government, it arose from below, at the behest of the committees themselves.⁵¹

As early as the beginning of March the communications and organisation commission of the Izhorsk works committee was established to "coordinate the actions of the workers' committee with the actions of other workers' committees". Coordination with other factories was discussed by workers at the Atlas engineering works on 4 March, and at San Galli the works committee quickly established contact with district organisations and other works committees. As we saw in chapter 3, works committees in state enterprises subject to the Artillery Department met to coordinate their activities as early as 13 March.⁵² At the beginning of May factory committees in the Nevskaya yarn company set up a body "for joint organisation and practical work" and a week later, workers at the six factories in the Voronin, Lyutsh and Cheshire group formed a central committee "for close contact and information about the operations of each factory".⁵³

Simultaneous with this process of inter-factory coordination went a process of coordinating factory committee activities in each district of the capital. The first district council of factory committees was created on Vasilevskii Island on 29 March. It issued

51. Goodey, C., 'Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', Critique, 3, Autumn 1974, 39.

52. Baklanova, I.A., Rabochie Petrograda v period mirnogo razvitiya revolyutsii, L., 1978, pp. 96 and 99.

53. Itkin, M.L., 'Tsentry fabrichno-zavodski'kh komitetov Rossii v 1917G', Voprosy Istorii, 1974, no. 2, p.27.

a leaflet to soldiers explaining why production for the war effort was being undermined and discussed the formation of a workers' club, the food situation and elections to the district дума.⁵⁴ Workers at the Arsenal and at Old Lessner proposed the setting up of a district council of factory committees on Vyborg Side but nothing seems to have come of it, for the council did not get off the ground until 4 September.⁵⁵ A more successful council was set up in Nevskii district in May, which represented 34 factory committees. In general, however, the attempt to establish a district level of factory committee organisation at first came up against various obstacles, causing the Second Factory Committee Conference in August to propose that the middle-level organisation of factory committees be on the basis of branch of industry rather than geographical district. It proved, however, even harder to organise on an industrial basis and so the Third Factory Committee Conference (10 September) once again pronounced in favour of territorial organisation and urged all districts to form district councils of factory committees.⁵⁶ In Okhta district this proposal met opposition from the defencist district soviet and from the district metalworkers' union but was implemented nevertheless.⁵⁷ In the next weeks councils were set up elsewhere and by October fully operational district councils existed in Nevskii, Peterhof and Vasilevskii districts and others were beginning to function.⁵⁸

54. Baklanova, op. cit., p.97.

55. Stepanov, op. cit., p.108.

56. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 2, pp. 36-7.

57. Rabochii Put', 7, 10 September 1917, p.4.

58. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 211-12; 218-9.

as protagonists of a decentralised economy run by the workers themselves. It is argued that the Bolsheviks pursued an opportunist policy towards the movement for workers' control, cynically supporting it until October not because they agreed with its aims, but because it was creating disorder in industry and undermining the capitalist class. Once they had gained power, however, the Bolsheviks crushed the factory committees, eradicated workers' control and reorganised the economy on hierarchical lines. Thus Avrich tells us:

From April to November, Lenin had aligned himself with the Anarcho-Syndicalists, who desired the utter annihilation of the old order... But after the Bolshevik Revolution was secured, Lenin abandoned the forces of destruction for those of centralisation and order.⁶⁶

In a more conspiratorial vein, Kaplan writes:

The factory committees...were used by the Bolsheviks as a mask for the seizure of economic power. The economy was to be disorganised by means of 'workers' control' of industry. Workers' control was to have a dual function: 1) to undermine the economy of the country so that the Provisional Government could not efficiently function; 2) to establish the basis for Bolshevik control over that economy.⁶⁷

Anweiler repeats the charge that the Bolsheviks disingenuously exploited workers' control for their own ends:

The Bolsheviks furthered the syndicalist and anarchist tendencies emerging in factory committees, whose general aim was workers' rule in the plants, without centralised direction from above and without regard to the state of

66. Avrich, Slavic Review, 1962, p.62.

67. Kaplan, op. cit., p.97.

the national economy.⁶⁸

It seems to me that such a line of interpretation is fundamentally misguided for a number of reasons. Firstly, as argued above, and amplified below, it is inadequate to argue that the aspirations of the factory committees were 'syndicalist'. Secondly, up to October, the Bolsheviks generally were not aware of any incompatibility between the workers' control of the factory committees and state organisation of the economy. Thirdly, to counterpose the factory committees to the Bolshevik party is incorrect, since most of the leading cadres of the factory committees were also members of the Bolshevik party. Finally, such a counter-position suggests that there was a uniformity of views within both the factory committees and the Bolshevik party which did not in fact exist.

What follows is not an attempt to recount debates on workers' control in detail, so much as to disclose the problematic of such debates and to discuss some of their implications.

a) Menshevik, SR and anarchist perspectives on control of the economy

The Menshevik and SR demand for state control of the economy was proffered as a solution to the severe crisis racking Russian industry. The right-wing Menshevik economist, Cherevanin, diagnosed the severity of the crisis at the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees in the following terms:

The economic life of Russia has reached a terrifying state of collapse. The country is already edging towards a catastrophe, which

68. Anweiler, O., The Soviets: the Russian Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Councils, 1905-21, New York: Random House, 1974, p.127.

threatens destitution and unemployment to the mass of the population and renders futile every struggle of the working masses to improve their position.⁶⁹

He explained this chaos as the result of the structural strain imposed on the economy by the war and by the demobilisation of the war industries, and not as the result of conscious "sabotage" by the capitalists.⁷⁰ The solution which he proposed was:

Planned intervention by the state in economic life via regulation of the distribution of raw materials, fuel and equipment between branches of production; via equal distribution of articles of consumption among the population; via forced trustification of the basic branches of production; via control of the banks; by the fixing of prices, profits and wages and by increased taxation of capitalist incomes.⁷¹

The Mensheviks utterly rejected "workers' control" as a serious strategy for controlling the economy. They believed that the Bolsheviks had popularised the slogan purely as a demagogic manoeuvre. As a strategy for dealing with economic chaos it was a recipe for disaster in their eyes. Workers' control encouraged decentralised, spontaneous initiatives by atomised groups of workers in individual enterprises and its net effect could only be to exacerbate economic chaos.⁷² What was required was planned, centralised, all-embracing

69. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.95.

70. The left-wing Menshevik, D. Dallin, did admit at the conference that industrialists were deliberately cutting back production, ibid., p.106.

71. ibid., p.95.

72. The much-depleted Menshevik cell at the Aivaz works in November bewailed the 'pernicious delusion that it is possible for workers to alleviate the economic chaos and protect the working masses from the effects of the rising cost of living and imminent unemployment simply by their own efforts'. Plamya, 1, 24 November 1917, p.4.

control of the economy, and only the state had at its disposal an apparatus adequate to this task. It was only through the state that the whole of democracy - and not just the working class - could participate in a massive public effort at economic control. The Mensheviks, supported by the SR's, favoured the representation of all popular organisations on government organs of economic regulation. They disliked the factory committees for being both parochial and purely proletarian and argued that, even at factory level, control of management should involve not just factory committees but representatives of government and "revolutionary democracy".⁷³

The official position of the SR party was very similar to that of the Mensheviks. They too believed in state control of the economy rather than in workers' control, but their reasons were somewhat different. The SR's objected in principle to one class - the working class - controlling the economy in its own interests. All popular forces should be involved in the business of control and this could best be done via the state, "because only the state is the representative of the interests of both the producers and consumers".⁷⁴ The SR's considered the factory committees as having the job of controlling hiring and firing, but denied them any privileged role in the control of production. They believed that workers' control as practised by the factory committees was leading to the atomisation of the economy and to conflict between the working

73. See Cherevanin's resolution to the third trade union conference. Tret'ya vserossiiskaya konferentsiya professional'nykh soyuzov, M., 1927, pp. 450-2.

74. 'Tezisy dlya agitatorov i propagandistov', Central Committee of SR party, no. 9, 1918 (no place of publication).

class and the peasantry.⁷⁵ The SR's, however, were a profoundly divided party and opinion within the party was as divided on the question of workers' control as on all other major questions of the day. The left wing of the party rejected calls for state control of the economy out of hand, but was unhappy with the notion of workers' control. Some Left SR's, such as V.M. Levin, the only SR of any standing in the Petrograd factory committee movement, propounded a notion of workers' control identical to that of the Bolsheviks, but the Left SR newspaper demanded 'public control' of the economy - by producers and consumers - via the factory committees, trade unions, cooperatives etc.⁷⁶ Other Left SR's called for control by the 'toiling people'. The heterodox SR Maximalists called for the socialisation of the factories, to be run by elected committees, but control of production by the factory committees until such time as this came about.⁷⁷

The attitude of the anarchists and syndicalists to workers' control of production varied. At the first factory committee conference Zhuk presented a mild resolution which called on the 'toiling people' (truzhenik-narod) "to take the organisation of their fate into their hands" and "to quickly create control commissions which will not only strictly monitor the running of the enterprise,

75. See resolution on factory committees passed by the third congress of the SR's, Delo Naroda, 64, 2 June 1917, p.2.

76. Znamya Truda, 13, 6 September 1917, p.4.

77. Volya Truda, 2, 12 September 1917, pp. 2-3; Volya Truda, 1, 1 September 1917, p.4.

but regulate the activity of the enterprise."⁷⁸ Other anarchists however demanded the seizure of factories by workers as a direct act of expropriation of the bourgeoisie. Naturally, they rejected any notion of state organisation of the economy - some going so far as to reject any kind of centralised coordination. The key concept was that of producers' communes linked into federations. Factory committees were seen as the embryos of such communes, whereas trade unions were seen as vestiges of capitalist society at best, or "living corpses" at worst.⁷⁹ Syndicalists, unlike their confreres in Western Europe, also tended to prefer the factory committees to the trade unions, though some toyed with the idea of federations of autonomous unions rather than of factory committees.

b) The Bolsheviks and workers' control

The Bolshevik party had no position on the question of workers' control prior to 1917. They began to formulate a position in response to deepening turmoil in the economy. Bolshevik policy on workers' control was forged in a context of rapid political and economic change. Because the party's ideas were in a process of formation, there is no absolute clarity, still less uniformity, in

78. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.94. Both anarchists and syndicalists preferred to talk of control by the 'toiling people', rather than by the 'working class'. G. Lapot, writing in the syndicalist newspaper, said: 'We are on the threshold of socialism: we need not only workers' but general toilers' control of production, distribution and transport - in a word, full toilers' control by peasants, workers and employees in all economic spheres'. Golos Truda, 10, 13 October 1917, p.2.

79. Bill Shatov's famous characterisation of the trade unions at the first national congress of trade unions in January 1918, Pervyi vserossiiskii s'ezd professional'nykh soyuzov, M., 1918, p.273.

its attempts to come to terms with the movement for workers' control. Lenin was the outstanding policy-maker in the party in 1917 and it is largely through his writings that I have tried to chart the development of Bolshevik policy, but it should not be assumed that party members obeisantly deferred to him. For purposes of clarity of argument, I shall assume that Lenin's thinking is that of the official party leadership; only subsequently shall I bring out differences in the views of party leaders.

In the period up to October 1917 a bitter debate raged around the question of control of the economy. This is usually presented as a debate between the Menshevik advocates of a statist solution to Russia's economic problems and the Bolshevik supporters of an anti-statist, grass-roots movement for workers' control of production. This is misleading, as it suggests that the key point at issue between the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks was whether control of the economy should be implemented by the state or by the workers in situ. Yet the Bolsheviks never deviated, before or after the October Revolution, from a commitment to a statist, centralised solution to economic disorder. The disagreement between the two wings of the socialist movement was not about state control in the abstract, but about what kind of state should coordinate control of the economy: a bourgeois state or a workers' state? In May 1917 Lenin wrote:

'State control' - we are for it. But by whom?
Who is in control? The bureaucrats (chinovniki)?
Or the Soviets?⁸⁰

80. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 32, M., 1962, p.438.

Unlike the Mensheviks, Lenin and the Bolsheviks resolutely refused to support initiatives undertaken by the Provisional Government to control economic chaos, not because they preferred democratic to governmental initiatives, but because they believed that, as a bourgeois government, its initiatives must necessarily be at the expense of working people. Even if the government sincerely tried to restore economic order, its measures would be either totally ineffective or, if more radical, would be sabotaged by capitalist interests.⁸¹ The fond hopes of the Mensheviks and SR's for state control of the economy in the general interest completely overlooked the class dimension of this control. This was the crux of the disagreement between the two wings of the socialist movement. "In essence", wrote Lenin, "the whole question of control boils down to who controls whom, i.e. which class is controlling and which is being controlled...We must resolutely and irrevocably pass over to control over the landowners and the capitalists by the workers and peasants."⁸² This was the nub of Bolshevik support for workers' control of the economy against the state control advocated by the Mensheviks and SR's.

81. Unlike Bukharin, who had argued that state regulation of the economy was indispensable in the monopoly phase of capitalism (Imperialism and World Economy, 1915), Lenin tended to stick to the more traditional view that state intervention was antagonistic to private ownership. He thus found it difficult to explain the apparent enthusiasm of certain sectors of capital for 'state control of the economy'. He wrote: 'Capitalists "warmly" recognise in words the "principle" of control and the necessity of it...but insist on only "gradual", planned, state-regulated introduction of such control. In actual fact, these plausible phrases merely hide the wrecking of control, its transformation into a fiction'. Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 34, M., 1974, pp. 157-8.

82. Lenin, ibid., p.175.

The Bolsheviks and Mensheviks did not disagree radically in the specific measures which they advocated for control of the economy. In a pamphlet written in September 1917, entitled The Impending Catastrophe and How to Fight It, Lenin summarised the major measures which were necessary. By far the most important, in his eyes, was the nationalisation of the banks, since no order could be brought into the economy unless the state had a firm hold on the nation's purse-strings. Second in importance, were measures to nationalise the largest syndicates in industries such as sugar, oil, coal and metallurgy. In addition industrialists and traders should be forced to join syndicates in order to facilitate government control. Finally, the whole population should be compulsorily organised into consumer societies to facilitate the distribution of subsistence commodities.⁸³ Lenin stressed in this pamphlet that there was absolutely nothing original in these concrete proposals: his sole point was to emphasise that these very simple measures could only be implemented once the working class wielded state power. If Lenin understood these measures as measures of 'workers' control', it is clear that he is here using the term in a very different sense from that of the factory committees. The proposals which he is advocating are thoroughly statist and centralist in character, whereas the practice of the factory committees was essentially local and decentralist. Should we conclude from this that Lenin never believed in workers' control in any sense other than as a counter-slogan to demands for state control? Would it be more accurate to characterise him not as an advocate of workers' control but rather of state control by a proletarian state?

83. Lenin, ibid., p.161.

The factory committees launched the slogan of workers' control of production quite independently of the Bolshevik party. It was not until May that the party began to take it up. Lenin had cleared an ideological space for the slogan in the April Theses, when he had demanded:

Such measures as the nationalisation of land, of all banks and capitalist syndicates, or, at least, the establishment of immediate control of them by the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, etc. - measures which do not in any way constitute the 'introduction' of socialism.⁸⁴

For a time, the Bolsheviks talked of control by the soviets: for instance, a leaflet put out at the beginning of May by the Lesnovskii subdistrict committee of the party, called for the "establishment of control by soviets of workers' and soldiers' deputies over the production and distribution of products".⁸⁵ As yet little mention was made of the factory committees. It was only at the end of May, when the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees registered the extent of support for the Bolsheviks within the committees, that the party leadership began to pay attention to these new institutions.

Lenin personally drafted the resolution on the economic crisis and workers' control which was put to the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees by Zinoviev. This resolution attacked attempts at bureaucratic regulation of the economy by the bourgeois state and called for a statewide system of workers' control of production and distribution. Workers' control was conceived as

84. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 31, M., 1962, p.168.

85. Listovki petrogradskikh bol'shevikov, 1917-20gg., vol. 3, L., 1957, p.40.

operating not only at local level in matters of supply and production, but also at national level in the spheres of banking, exchange between town and countryside, labour discipline, labour allocation and workers' defence.⁸⁶ The resolution was passed by a majority of 297 votes to 21, with 44 abstentions.⁸⁷ The resolution clearly understands 'control' in the sense of 'checking' or 'supervising', rather than of 'managing'. Lenin invariably linked the word 'kontrol' to the word 'uchet', or 'accounting'; 'accounting' was central to Lenin's vision of socialism at this time.⁸⁸ This 'accounting', however, is not confined to central government level. Lenin envisages that it will be based at the grass roots and coordinated into a national system. Right up to the beginning of 1918, Lenin saw absolutely no contradiction between centralised control and the creative initiatives of workers in their factories. Indeed he never tired of insisting that local initiatives were the bedrock of centralised control. It was precisely the creativity of the masses which qualitatively distinguished workers' control from the reactionary bureaucratic control of the bourgeois state:

Vital creativity of the masses - that is the fundamental factor in the new society. Let the workers take on the creation of workers' control in their works and factories, let them supply the countryside with manufactured goods in exchange for bread. Not one article,

86. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 32, pp. 195-7; Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.86.

87. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.70.

88. In November 1917 Lenin gave the following, problematic definition of socialism: 'Socialism equals accounting. If you wish to account for every piece of iron and fabric, then that will be socialism', Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 35, M., 1962, p.63.

not one funt of bread must remain unaccounted for, since socialism is first and foremost accounting. Socialism is not created by orders from on high. Its spirit is alien to state-bureaucratic automatism. Socialism is vital and creative, it is the creation of the popular masses themselves.⁸⁹

Between August 1917, when he wrote The State and Revolution, and the beginning of 1918, Lenin was to harp continuously on the theme of working class self-activity.⁹⁰ Far from seeing such self-activity as antipathetic to centralised control of the economy, he viewed it as its absolute precondition:

Let every factory committee feel concerned not only with the affairs of its factory but let it also feel that it is an organisational cell for the construction of the whole of state life...There cannot and will not be any concrete plan for the organisation of economic life. No one can offer this. The masses can do this only from below, by their own experience. There will, of course, be instructions given and paths sketched out, but we must begin immediately from above and from below.⁹¹

It cannot be said that Lenin satisfactorily theorised the relationship between grass-roots workers' control of production and state-wide regulation of the economy, and the Bolsheviks were soon to learn through bitter experience how difficult it was to reconcile the two in practice

c) The Factory Committee Conference debates on workers' control

When one examines the debates on workers' control at the factory committee conferences an immediate problem arises. For it emerges

89. ibid., p.57.

90. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 33, M., 1962.

91. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 35, p.148.

that there is no authentic, spontaneous 'factory committee' discourse which can be counterposed to official Bolshevik discourse, for a majority of the delegates at these conferences were themselves Bolsheviks and the conferences voted overwhelmingly for Bolshevik-inspired resolutions. It could be argued that the factory committee conferences are not, therefore, a true reflection of opinion within the movement but rather occasions for the Bolshevik party to win formalistic ratification of its policies. This is unconvincing on two scores. Firstly, the hundreds of delegates who attended these conferences were bona fide representatives sent from individual factories in Petrograd.⁹² Secondly, these delegates had to choose between the very different policies on workers' control, put forward by the three major factions - Bolshevik, Menshevik and anarcho-syndicalist. If, as Avrich and others argue, factory committees on the ground were 'syndicalist', why did their delegates so decisively reject the perspective projected at these conferences by anarcho-syndicalists such as Zhuk or Bill Shatov, the former Wobblie? The answer can only be that most factory committee members recognised the need for some degree of centralised coordination of control, as the Bolsheviks argued, whereas the anarcho-syndicalists decidedly did not. At every conference they voted overwhelmingly for the formula of 'state workers' control'.

As we have seen, the first resolution on workers' control passed by a conference of factory committees was drafted by Lenin himself and envisaged a centrally-coordinated system of workers'

92. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 2, pp. 217-63.

control. At the Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees, which took place from 7 to 12 August, against a background of rapid economic breakdown, V.P. Milyutin, from the Bolshevik Central Committee, introduced a resolution on workers' control which was passed overwhelmingly by 213 votes to 26, with 22 abstentions.⁹³ This was in many ways the most comprehensive exposition of Bolshevik policy for dealing with the economic crisis. It saw the crisis as the consequence of the burdens placed upon the economy by the war, but blamed the bourgeoisie and the Provisional Government for aggravating disorder. It stressed the need to end the war, which, it claimed, was not only destroying the nation's productive forces, but also leading to excessive centralisation of production in the hands of a militarist state and the consequent enserfment of the proletariat. It demanded that state power be transferred into the hands of the proletariat and the poor peasantry so that they could begin the job of state regulation of the economy. The whole thrust of Milyutin's resolution was towards regulation of the economy at macro- rather than micro-level, since it called for nationalisation of the banks and monopolies. 'Workers' control' figured comparatively little and was envisaged as operating at central level through the assignment to the soviets, trade unions and factory committees of a majority of places in government organs of control. To tackle the financial crisis, the resolution proposed an end to the issue of paper money, the cancellation of state debts and the investigation of company finances. The resolution underlined the necessity for allocation of manpower and for general labour conscription once power was in the hands of the people. In spite of its generally centralised tenor, the resol-

93. ibid., vol. 1, p.215.

ution did mention initiatives in the localities by trade unions, factory committees and soviets.⁹⁴

The Third Factory Committee Conference met on September 10 in the wake of the Kornilov rebellion and the Skobelev circulars. The conference paid more attention to politics than its predecessors, warning of the danger of counter-revolution, condemning the Democratic Conference, clamouring for the revocation of the Skobelev circulars and demanding the broadening of workers' control to thwart the machinations of the extreme right. The leitmotif of the Fourth Conference a month later (10 October) was again the danger from the right. The Bolshevik, Skrypnik, defined the tasks of the factory committees as "struggle with the counter-revolution in the sphere of production". The discussions at the conference reflected a growing awareness that whilst the factory committees were equipped to combat disorganisation by individual capitalists, they were not able to deal with large-scale problems such as the demobilisation of the war industries. A heavy accent was therefore placed on the need for greater centralisation of the movement for workers' control to stem the systemic chaos in the national economy. Zhivotov hoped that the forthcoming All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees would create a national apparatus to control the economy.⁹⁵ And Skorodumov amplified this:

partial control of production cannot bring significant results and we are calling the Conference in order to establish control over industry as a whole.⁹⁶

94. ibid., pp. 217-9.

95. ibid., vol. 2, p.121.

96. ibid., p.122.

The resolution summoning an All-Russian Conference called for:

the unification of the activities of the working class in the task of regulating the economic life of the country, so that once it has power in its hands, the working class can, finally, with the support of the poor peasantry, fight the self-interest of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and bring planning and organisation into the sphere of production.⁹⁷

At the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees, which met from 17-22 October, Milyutin was once again the proponent of the resolution on workers' control. His resolution demanded a transfer of state power to the soviets and a break with the policies of the moderate socialist parties, the transfer of land to the peasants and the nationalisation of the major branches of industry. Clause four of the resolution proclaimed:

The workers' control being implemented in the localities through the factory committees must be organised into a state-wide system, for only then will it achieve real, serious results. A majority (2/3) of the members of the organs of control must be workers, delegated by the factory committees, trade unions and the Soviet of workers' deputies. As well as workers' representatives, there must be scientifically-educated technical personnel (engineers, technicians, etc.).⁹⁸

Larin, a recent convert from left-wing Menshevism, was then called upon to concretise the perspectives put forward by Milyutin, but proceeded instead to propound a very moderate, schematic interpretation of workers' control. Largely ignoring the practical work of the factory committees, he argued for the primacy of planning, and

97. ibid., p.124.

98. ibid., pp. 170-1.

proposed that the trade unions and factory committees become executors of a central economic plan.⁹⁹ Skrypnik criticised Larin's proposals on the grounds that they suggested that workers' control could be integrated into a system of planning this side of the revolution. He argued that workers' control was a transitional class measure which could develop into a state-wide system of regulated production only when power had been transferred to the masses.¹⁰⁰ The final resolution passed by 65 votes to 8, with one abstention, followed the general line of Milyutin and Larin but was considerably more specific. It called for workers' control to be coordinated into a state-wide system, regulated by a plan. Factory committees were to be amalgamated by branch of production, and at enterprise level were to handle such matters as hiring and firing, disputes with the administration and supplies, within the overall context of the plan.¹⁰¹

The outstanding support for the formula of 'state workers' control' suggests that factory committees on the ground recognised that grass-roots creativity by itself was not enough and that to be effective 'control' must be centrally coordinated. There thus never existed a clear-cut antinomy between Lenin, the proponent of state-wide, centralised control and the factory committees, proponents of grass roots creativity. All the major statements from factory committee organisations both before and after October bear ample testimony to their belief that order could be restored to the economy only by the action of a proletarian government. Moreover

99. ibid., pp. 171-4.

100. ibid., pp. 179-80; 184.

101. ibid., pp. 186-8.

the examination of the resolutions on workers' control passed by the factory committee conferences reveals two clear shifts in thinking: firstly, a shift in concern from rather narrow economic problems to more broadly political ones; secondly, a growing awareness of the need for state-wide, centralised control of the economy. Yet one should not infer from this brief survey of the factory committee debates that there was pure consonance on the question of workers' control. If one looks more closely at the debates of the conferences, differences do begin to emerge. These are not differences between 'syndicalists' and Bolsheviks, they are differences within the Bolshevik party. These differences centre on two problems: the first concerns the differing estimations of the efficacy of workers' control as a cure for Russia's economic ills; the second concerns the importance attached to the factory committees as agencies of 'control'.

Two broad currents of opinion emerged at the factory committee conferences with respect to the capacity of workers' control to resolve the economic crisis. The chief exponents of 'state workers' control', Milyutin and Larin, put the main emphasis on central planning rather than grass roots control. In so doing, they were close ideologically to important Bolshevik trade union leaders such as Ryazanov, Lozovskii, Shlyapnikov and Schmidt. In contrast, the Bolsheviks on the Central Council of Factory Committees, such as Skrypnik, Chubar', Antipov and Amosov, whilst supporting calls for 'state workers' control', placed heavy emphasis on the importance of local initiatives. They were more optimistic than leading Bolshevik economists and trade unionists about the potentiality of workers'

control to combat disorder. This was not because they were principled believers in decentralisation, but because they shared with many rank-and-file workers, a belief that the crisis in the economy was caused essentially by the conscious sabotage of industrialists, which could be halted by determined action on the part of factory committees. They tended to ignore the complex structural character of the crisis, seeing the economic disruption as the direct product of sabotage, and until autumn at least, many factory committees rather naively assumed that by combatting disorganisation in their particular enterprise they would bring order into the economy as a whole and create the conditions for its transformation along socialist lines. The Bolshevik, Zhivotov, a worker at the 1886 Electric Light Company, explained the tasks of workers' control to the First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees:

One must be blind or mentally subnormal not to see the counter-revolutionary work of the bourgeoisie. The sabotage of coal-owners in the Donbass, the sabotage in the textile industry and similar organised sabotage by employers in a whole number of Petrograd factories demand the organised intervention of the working class in the form of the immediate establishment of workers' control.¹⁰²

Zhivotov clearly had more faith in popular initiative as a means of combatting economic disorder than did Bolsheviks such as Milyutin, who believed that the structural crisis of capitalism could only be solved through socialist measures at a national level by a proletarian state.

102. ibid., vol. 1, p.106.

The second area in which there was a clear divergence of emphasis was related to the first and concerned the precise responsibilities of the factory committees. Bolsheviks connected with the factory committees assigned full responsibility for workers' control of production to the committees alone. This never became official Bolshevik party policy. Party statements viewed 'state workers' control' as being the responsibility not just of factory committees but of all labour organisations. Milyutin's resolution to the Third All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions at the end of June concerning workers' control did not even mention factory committees and spoke of control being the joint responsibility of soviets and trade unions.¹⁰³ Again the Sixth Party Congress spent much time discussing the trade unions and the economic crisis, but barely mentioned the factory committees.¹⁰⁴ This was but one aspect of a more general tendency by the official leadership of the Bolshevik party to underestimate and, indeed, ignore the factory committees.

To those who believe that the Bolsheviks connived to jump on the factory committee bandwagon, it must come as a shock to realise how little attention leading Bolsheviks paid to the committees. They were, after all, probably the most important organisations in the Russian Revolution - more important even than the Soviets, from the point of view of their closeness to the masses and their function of mediating between the mass of workers and the Bolshevik party. Yet when Lenin came to revise the party programme in the autumn, he

103. Tret'ya Konferentsiya, pp. 482-4.

104. Shestoi s"ezd RSDRP(b): Protokoly, M., 1958, pp. 261-3.

forgot to mention the committees or the need for democratic organisation in the factories.¹⁰⁵ This, it seems, was largely because of his total absorption in the political question. Whilst he spent the whole summer trying to understand the soviets as embryonic forms of the proletarian state, he paid scant attention to the factory committees. This was because he considered that the struggle for state power took precedence over the struggle for power in production. He believed that there could be no proletarian power in the factory before the achievement of proletarian power in the state.¹⁰⁶ This led him to neglect the theoretical and political problems concerning the articulation of the movement for workers' control with the drive for soviet power. After the October Revolution, it was to have grave consequences in the shape of a theoretical and political foreclosure of the movement for workers' self-management.

105. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 32, pp. 139-62; cf. Larin's critique of the draft programme, Rabochii Put', 31, 8 October 1917, p.2.

106. In this belief, Lenin was at odds with Gramsci, leader of the Italian factory councils, who envisaged proletarian state power growing up on the basis of workers' power in the factories, and who saw the struggle for workers' control as growing naturally into a contestation for state power. On this point, as on many others, it was Bordiga, not Gramsci, who was closer to Lenin. It is also worth noting in this connection that Gramsci saw the Italian councils as the (potential) equivalent of the Russian soviets. He believed that the forms of the proletarian state must be councils based on production. In Russia, however, it was the factory committees which were based on production, whereas the soviets were organised on a territorial basis (though largely elected on a production basis). Gramsci rejected Bordiga's call for territorially-based organisation, since he believed that it was as producers, that the working class would make communism. See Gramsci, A., Political Writings, 1910-20; Williams, G., Proletarian Order. One should note, finally, that both Trotsky and Ordzhonikidze claim that Lenin toyed with the idea of making the factory committees state organs instead of the soviets, but this was a purely tactical turn, reflecting Lenin's anxieties about the political reliability of the soviets. It did not mark a worked-out integration of the committees into a strategy for the achievement of socialism. Trotsky, History of the Russian Revolution, vol. 2, London: Sphere Bks, 303.

F. HOW WORKERS' CONTROL OF PRODUCTION WAS VIEWED AT FACTORY LEVEL

It is difficult from the extant evidence to discover how factory committees on the ground understood workers' control. One comes closest to understanding the meaning of workers' control at grass roots level by looking at the practice, rather than the theory, of workers' control, and, as we have seen, this practice is not compatible with the interpretation of the movement as 'syndicalist'. Nevertheless a certain amount of evidence exists as to rank-and-file attitudes to workers' control which it is worth reviewing.

The most important source of evidence on this matter are the resolutions passed by general meetings of workers in the factories of the capital. There are several historiographical problems related to interpretation of these resolutions, not least because they cannot be considered as spontaneous utterances of the workers, since they were often drafted by local party organisations and put to general meetings for ratification. Nevertheless, even where workers did not themselves draft the resolution, several different resolutions would usually be put to a general meeting for discussion and so choice of a Bolshevik rather than Menshevik resolution is some indirect indication of opinion within the factory.

An analysis of resolutions which mention control of the economy reveals that workers overwhelmingly supported the Bolshevik formula of 'workers' control of production'. Resolutions using this formula were passed in August and September (when the disorder in the economy had become a critical issue) by workers at the Baltic, Triangle, Putilov, Kuznetsov and Westinghouse works, at several textile mills and by the Vasilevskii district council of factory

committees.¹⁰⁷ In September many resolutions use the rather more orthodox Bolshevik formula of 'workers' control of production at a state-wide level' to distinguish workers' control from any anarchist project of individual factory squires. Resolutions at Aivaz, Langenzippen, the Pipe Works and one by Lithuanian workers on Vyborg Side use this formula.¹⁰⁸ This formula was not a compromise with Menshevism:- it was that which was embodied in the Bolshevik resolution passed by the first national conference of factory committees in October. Occasionally, resolutions were passed which do appear to be attempts to bridge differences between Bolshevik and Menshevik conceptions of control. Resolutions passed at the Stein company, the Baranovskii works and elsewhere in July, called for 'state control with a majority of workers',¹⁰⁹ as did a resolution by Obukhov workers in October.¹¹⁰ A resolution passed by metalworkers' union delegates on 26 July called for 'the implementation of real control of production and distribution of products and state regulation of industry'.¹¹¹ In September the first national textileworkers' conference, which had a big Bolshevik majority, passed a resolution calling for 'state regulation of industry on a national scale under workers' control'.¹¹² In contrast to Moscow, however, the Menshevik call for 'state control of the economy' had little resonance within the Petrograd labour

107. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, pp. 92, 103-4, 110, 135; Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v avguste, M., 1959, p.212; Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre, M., 1961, pp. 259,292,311.

108. Okt. voor. vosst., pp. 92, 96, 99, 125, 133.

109. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule, M., 1959, pp. 352-3.

110. Pravda, 178, 3 November 1917, p.4.

111. LGIA, f. 1477, op. 3, d. 1, l.66.

112. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre, pp. 329-30.

movement.¹¹³

More common in Petrograd were workers' resolutions which called for control of production by the 'toiling people', suggesting Left SR or anarchist influence. It is interesting to note, however, that the marxist notion of the 'working class' often underwent a populist inflection in working-class discourse - apparently spontaneously - to become the 'toiling people' (trudovoi narod). Resolutions incorporating this formula, therefore, may not necessarily have been drafted by Left SR's or anarchists. At the beginning of August workers in the iron-rolling shop at Putilov passed an earthy resolution which declared:

We, workers of the iron-rolling shop, having discussed at a general meeting the impending crisis in industry and the widespread hunger, demand:

1) that the Ministry of Labour immediately order factory owners and industrialists to stop their game of 'cat and mouse' and start at once to mine more coal and ore, and to produce more agricultural tools and machines in order to reduce the number of unemployed and halt the closure of works and factories. If Messrs. Capitalists will not pay attention to our demand, then we, the workers of the iron-rolling shop, demand total control of the branches of industry by the toiling people...

4) ...From you capitalists, weeping crocodile tears, we demand you stop weeping about chaos which you yourselves have created. Your cards are on the table, the game is up, your persecution can no longer be successful. Go off and

113. Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy v bor'be, pp. 226-7. The first conference of factory committees in Moscow called for 'democratic' control of the factory committees, though the second in October called for workers' control. Most of the resolutions which called for state control in Petrograd were passed before the autumn. See, for example, the resolution of the seventh district of the Putilov works which, as late as the end of July, expressed support for the new Coalition government and called for state control of the economy. Zemlya i Volya, 103, 30 July 1917, p.3.

hide. Think your own thoughts and don't dare show your noses, or else you'll find yourselves without a nose and head to boot.¹¹⁴

On 14 September workers at the Cable Works agreed that "the normal course of life can go on only if there is strict control of enterprises and of all products and also a transfer of power into the hands of the toiling people".¹¹⁵ Resolutions which show clear Left SR influence sometimes used the 'workers' control' formula, and, in spite of their populism, clearly conceived of this control as operating in a centralised fashion. One such resolution passed by workers at the New Admiralty shipyard on 30 September and published in the Left SR newspaper, condemned the Democratic Conference for not expressing the 'people's will' (narodnaya volya) and went on to demand:

the establishment of a genuinely revolutionary government (vlast'), a government of the Soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, which must strengthen and deepen the gains of the revolution by immediately summoning a Constituent Assembly to resolve economic disorder, by instituting workers' control of production and distribution, taking no account of the interests of the handful of pirates, by bringing an end to the war, having declared democratic conditions for peace and having torn up the tsarist treaties and by giving land to the peasants and bread to the urban democracy.¹¹⁶

It is very difficult to find obviously anarchist or syndicalist resolutions on economic questions passed by workers in Petrograd. One clear example is the resolution passed by workers in one of the

115. Okt. voor. vosst., p.91.

116. Znamya Truda, 32, 30 September 1917, p.3.

shops at Langenzippen in July, which stated that "the country can be brought out of the chaos in its finances and food supplies only by the proletariat, in union with the peasantry, organised into pure class autonomous organisations, united on the basis of federalism, which will implement full control in all branches of industry without exception".¹¹⁷ A symptom of anarchist influence may have been the use of a formula about workers taking the factories 'into their own hands'. Zhuk, the syndicalist, Piontovskii and the SR Maximalist, Vas'ko, all employed this formula at the factory committee conferences, but other evidence shows that left Bolsheviks also used the phrase, as a way of talking about workers' self-management - though Milyutin expressly ruled out this phrase at the national conference.¹¹⁸ Strangely, the resolution which calls most directly for the transfer of factories into the hands of the workers was passed by two branches of the metalworkers' union rather than by a factory committee. A syndicalist resolution, passed by the Kolpino district delegates of the metal union on 10 August 1917 and by the Nevskii district delegates on 25 August, recommended:

as the only radical method of struggle... that the metalworkers' union take all factories and works into its own hands...and liaise closely with the CCFC...so that when the time comes for the factories to be transferred into the hands of the workers, there will be cells in the localities ready not just to take over but to continue running the factories.¹¹⁹

117. Golos Truda, 3. 25 August 1917, p.3.

118. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 2, pp. 179-81.

119. Golos Truda, 4, 1 September 1917, p.4; Proletarii, 9, 23 September 1917, p.4.

This impressionistic survey of workers' resolutions on control of the economy can hardly claim to be a scientific analysis of working-class attitudes to this question, but it does show that the Bolshevik formula of 'workers' control of production and distribution' was the one most widely supported by workers in Petrograd. Populist formulations about control by the 'toiling people' figure fairly prominently, but Menshevik, anarchist or syndicalist formulations are rare. Some resolutions merely demanded 'control of production', such as one by the Putilov workers on October 11, without specifying what kind of control.¹²⁰ Another called for control by the factory committees.¹²¹ Despite a limited degree of variety in the formulations used, suggesting some variation in conceptualisations of control of the economy, the vast majority of resolutions share one thing in common. This is a belief that economic disruption is primarily the result of wilful, malicious 'sabotage' by the employers. 'Sabotage' and 'saboteur' were key words in popular discourse during the revolution and, as we have seen, Bolsheviks in the factory committees harped constantly on this theme.¹²²

120. Okt. voor. vosst., p.113.

121. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre, p.302.

122. Compare the fictional dialogue between two bandits during the Civil War, as described by Pasternak in Dr. Zhivago:

"All right, but just tell me one thing, Goshka. I still don't know all those words about socialism. What's the expression sabotazhnik (saboteur, SAS), for instance? What does it mean?

I'm an expert on all those words; but I tell you, Terenty, I'm drunk, leave me alone. A sabotozhnik is someone who belongs to the same gang. A vataga is a gang, isn't it? Well if you say savatazhnik, it means you belong to the same gang. Do you understand, you mug?

That's what I thought it was - a swear word.

Pasternak, B., Dr. Zhivago, translated M. Hayward, London: Collins, 1958, p.27.

8. THE DEEPENING ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF WORKERS' CONTROL

By mid-summer 1917 the crisis in industry was leading to factory closures and rising unemployment. Between March and July, 568 factories - mainly textile and flour mills—employing some 104,000 workers, shut down operations. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta analysed the chief causes of closure as being: firstly, shortages of cotton, grain and other raw materials; secondly, the 'excessive' demands of the workers; thirdly, too few orders; fourthly, lack of fuel; fifthly, declining profitability. The regions worst affected were the Moscow Industrial Region and Southern Russia.¹ After July the scale of unemployment increased, as supplies of fuel and raw materials began to dry up. It was mainly small firms which closed down, but larger firms contributed their share to the pool of unemployment. Before October Petrograd was not as badly affected as other areas by unemployment.

There are no reliable data on the number of unemployed in either Russia or Petrograd for the period after July. In Petrograd's largest industry - the metal industry - the number of metalworkers registering each day with the union as having no job rose from 37.4 in July to 71.3 in October.² Skilled metalworkers could still manage to find jobs, however, so that only about 3% of members of the metal union were unemployed in October.³ Other industries were

1. Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta, 213, 1 October 1917, pp. 1-2.

2. Delo Naroda, 176, 10 October 1917, p.1.

3. Rabochaya Gazeta, 143, 26 August 1917, p.2; Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo voozuzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, pp. 143-4.

worse hit: the shortage of sugar meant that the Petrograd confectionary industry was on the verge of extinction, thus threatening the livelihood of 4,000 workers.⁴ Grain shortages meant that many bakery workers were out of work.⁵ In the print industry unemployment was growing rapidly, owing to the paper shortage; by October about 1,000 printers in the capital were out of work.⁶ Other industries, such as textiles, tailoring and woodworking, were not yet suffering closures and redundancies, though their prospects were uniformly bleak. In all, there were probably about 8,000 registered unemployed in the middle of October, and although the real figure was almost certainly much higher, the rate of unemployment in the capital was still lower than elsewhere in the country. This was due to the success of factory committees and trade unions in blocking government attempts to demobilise the state enterprises producing for the war effort, and the attempts by private entrepreneurs to cut the size of their workforces.

As the economic crisis deepened, so the tempo of class conflict accelerated. As the workers became more combative and as profits disappeared, so industrialists became less willing to invest in their enterprises or to take on new orders. At the beginning of June the Minister of Trade and Industry declared that "entrepreneurs, not feeling themselves on firm ground, have lost the appropriate energy. They desire a halt to production or seek to

4. Delo Naroda, 160, 21 September 1917, p.4; Rabochii Put', 18, 23 September 1917, p.4.

5. Rabota soyuza muchnykh izdelii i osnovanie soyuzapishchevnikov - 1917 god, L., 1927, p.16.

6. Stepanov, op. cit., p.144.

transfer the rocketing costs of production onto the broad circles of consumers and onto the exchequer by exorbitant increases in commodity prices".⁷ In Southern and Central Russia from early summer industrialists began to wage war on the militant working class, seeking to crush its militancy with the cudgel of unemployment. In the Urals and the Donbass, and to some extent in the Moscow Industrial Region, organisations of employers launched a coordinated strategy of lockouts, designed to demoralise workers and to prove to the public that interference in production, excessive wage increases and the eight-hour day were bringing industry to its knees.⁸ In Petrograd the policy of cut-backs, closures and lockouts was less aggressive. The large factories had not yet been pushed into a corner and working-class resistance was too well-organised to be easily quashed. By June Petrograd employers were alarmed that they had made a terrible miscalculation in plumping for a policy of concession rather than repression after the February Revolution. The workers, instead of succumbing to the blandishments of a liberal industrial relations policy, were growing ever more immoderate in their demands. The SFWO complained:

Industrialists have made very significant concessions, they have made a big sacrifice in the hope of restarting work in the factories and mills, but the demands of workers and employees have gone beyond what is possible.⁹

7. Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii nakanune velikoi oktyabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revolyutsii, part 1, M.L., 1957, p.225.

8. Volobuev, P.V., Proletariat i burzhuziya Rossii v 1917g., M., 1964, pp. 302, 306.

9. Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, part 1, p.166. The talk of 'big sacrifices' must be treated with a pinch of salt, in view of the fact that profits in private industry in Petrograd rose in real terms by 125% between 1913 and 1916. Strumilin, S.G., Izbrannye Proizvedeniya, vol. 1, M., 1963, p.186.

From June onwards Petrograd employers adopted a much tougher industrial policy, resisting wage increases and cutting back production in the hope that growing unemployment would make the workers 'see sense'.

The shift in the attitude of employers was paralleled by a shift in the attitude of the government towards the labour problem. Under the first Coalition Government, formed at the beginning of May, a proper Ministry of Labour had come into being. This was headed by the Menshevik, M.I. Skobelev, assisted by P.N. Kokokol'nikov, an experienced trade unionist of right-wing Menshevik persuasion, and K.A. Gvozdev, *bête noire* of the labour left because of his pivotal role in the Workers Group of the War Industries Committee. These Mensheviks came into the new Ministry committed to a programme of 'broad social reforms'.¹⁰ Skobelev promised to meet the just demands of the masses, to intervene in the economy and to confiscate the profits of the captains of industry,¹¹ but these promises stuck in the throats of the majority of staunchly conservative government ministers. They despatched Skobelev's reform proposals into the labyrinth of government committees, from whence only three saw the light of day. On 11 July labour inspectors were established, as a first step towards revamping the system of factory inspection.¹² On

10. Izvestiya, 63, 11 May 1917, p.1.

11. Izvestiya, 65, 13 May 1917; Izvestiya, 68, 17 May 1917.

12. Browder, R.P. and Kerensky, A.F., The Russian Provisional Government, vol. 1, p.745. In July 1917 the 1912 social insurance legislation was extended so that all workers received sick pay and accident compensation, ibid., p.739.

8 August night work was banned for women and minors under 17 - except in defence enterprises. And on 8 October maternity pay was introduced. All other proposals for comprehensive social insurance failed to reach the statute book, owing to opposition from within the government and from the employers who accused the Ministry of Labour of "defending the exclusive interests of the working class...completely ignoring the interests...of the other side".¹³

By June the reforming zeal of the Menshevik ministers was becoming swamped by their concern to defuse explosive class antagonisms. The Ministry of Labour tried to encourage a partnership between capital and labour, but although Skobelev still paid lip-service to the plight of the working class, he tended increasingly to see low labour productivity as the root of Russia's economic ills. When visited by a deputation of mine-owners from Southern Russia on 13 June Skobelev reportedly promised them help in curtailing working-class demands, which he concurred were "immoderate" and "in conflict with the general well-being". In an address to workers on 28 June Skobelev condemned "arbitrary" actions by workers which "disorganise industry and exhaust the exchequer".¹⁴ The need for sacrifice became the leitmotif of Skobelev's speeches, one which modulated into appeals for an end to industrial conflict "in the name of strengthening the revolution and honouring our ultimate ideals".¹⁵ Yet in spite of extravagant

13. ibid., pp. 740, 746; Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, vol. 1, pp. 209, 537-8; Volobuev, op. cit., p.338.

14. Cited by Volobuev, op. cit., p.205.

15. ibid.

displays of impartiality, Skobelev could not win the trust of the Minister of Trade and Industry, A.I. Konovalov, who led an onslaught against further wage increases at a time when the Ministry of Labour was enmeshed in painful negotiations over union wage contracts.¹⁶ Efforts to establish cooperation between the two sides of industry were thus rendered void not just by bitter class conflict in industry but by resistance from bourgeois ministers within the government.

After the July Days the Kerensky government shifted sharply to the right, under sustained pressure from industrialists, financiers and the General Staff. Demands from employers for the militarisation of labour in defence industries and in transport, for a declaration of a state of emergency in the Donbass evoked a favourable response from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and from the Special Commission on Defence. The position of the Ministry of Labour became more untenable, as it was torn between the irreconcilable forces of capital and labour; it oscillated between minor concessions and promises of reform and puny displays of strength, such as the Skobelev circulars (see below).

Workers resist attempts to evacuate Petrograd industry

As early as the latter half of 1916, the tsarist government began to discuss the possibility of 'relieving' (razgruzka, lit.

16. ibid., pp. 294-5.

'unloading') Petrograd of some of its factories to ease the fuel shortage.¹⁷ On 7 April 1917 the Special Commission on Defence discussed the possibility of transferring key factories from the capital to areas closer to sources of fuel and raw materials. News of the discussion provoked uproar among workers, so the government resolved to tread warily. On 6 July a special committee was set up to plan the relief of industry, which in August recommended that plant and equipment be evacuated from 47 large factories in Petrograd, including all state enterprises and the largest private engineering and chemical works.¹⁸ Only some of the workers at these factories were to be evacuated; the rest were to be dismissed with two weeks' pay. The German occupation of Riga on 21 August and the threat of a German advance on Petrograd caused the government to contemplate a far more ambitious evacuation than had originally been intended with the plans for partial relief. The dominant motive of the government in laying plans for evacuation of industry appears to have been a desire to rationalise war production and a fear of German occupation. In working-class circles, however, the government plans were seen as a thinly-disguised attempt to break the power of the revolutionary movement by the simple device of ^{destroying} its physical base.

When news first broke in May of plans for the 'relief' of

17. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue 1, Pg., 1918, p.18.

industry, workers lost no time in letting the government know their views. On 20 May at Putilov, workers in the gun shop, which was dominated politically by Mensheviks, unanimously resolved:

If the relief of Petrograd is necessary in the interests of rational distribution of food products and rational allocation of fuel, for the benefit of all toilers, then Petrograd must be relieved in the first place of:

- 1) idlers, drones, men and women in monasteries, those who live off their incomes, those who do not work or serve,
- 2) those hired workers brought by force or deception from Asia, who should be sent back.
- 3) The transfer of all luxury items along the rail- and water-ways should be halted and these means of transport should be used to convey fuel, fodder and foodstuffs to wherever they are required. We protest against the slanders that accuse workers of disrupting transport, and point out that it is those who defend the monks and the opponents of the democratic republic who are causing and aggravating chaos in the state, and who should be replaced immediately by elected representatives of the peasants and workers.

...We demand control of production, industry and capital, since the capitalists and industrialists are deliberately leading the country to ruin.

We demand of the Coalition Government, through the Soviet of workers' and peasants' deputies, that the will of the people be fulfilled unconditionally. If it takes just one step away from this path, then the soviet should recall the socialist ministers from the government and transfer power to the soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies.¹⁹

Another resolution passed at Putilov at this time by 700 workers in the boiler and steam-boiler shops denounced evacuation plans as a "counter-revolutionary trick of the bourgeoisie to rid Petersburg of organised revolutionary workers and to scatter them to the backwoods (glush') of Russia". They called for the city

19. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets v trekh revolyutsii, L., 1933, pp. 340-1.

to be relieved of "the bourgeois idlers who stroll along Nevskii and Morskaya streets stopping off at restaurants".²⁰ Workers in the Putilov forge also denounced the evacuation plans as a counter-revolutionary plot and continued:

We, workers and peasants, will stay put, since we believe that, once the right balance of conflicting forces is struck, the people will have the opportunity to take power into their own hands and then no crisis need occur. We suggest that Petrograd be unloaded of its monasteries, infirmaries, asylums, alms-houses and many thousands of idle bourgeois. We also propose to find out why there is such a great concentration of Chinese in the city".²¹

These three resolutions all display a fierce hostility to the parasitic bourgeoisie, a strong sense of the workers as a productive class, a deep anti-religious feeling, a covert racism towards immigrant workers, not to say a certain lack of imaginative sympathy for the unfortunates in the alms-houses and asylums.

The themes encapsulated in the Putilov resolutions were echoed in many other protests against 'relief' of industry. Somewhat unusually, workers at Sestroretsk blamed the industrial chaos not on deliberate sabotage, but on "the disorganisation and anarchy of the capitalist system". To the standard list of proposed evacuees, they added "courtesans, those who play the stock-exchange, speculators and other social parasites".²² Bolshevik-minded workers at New Lessner added to the list, "yellow

20. ibid. p.340.

21. Delo Naroda, 62, 31 May 1917, p.4.

22. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v mae/iyune, M., 1959, pp. 280-1.

labour" and "peasants to be sent back to the fields"; while workers at the Pella engineering works had the bright idea of "ridding Petrograd...of the gentlemen who can only cry 'War to Victory!'"²³ Similar resolutions, condemning the evacuation plans as a move to disperse the revolutionary proletariat, were passed by workers at the Russo-Baltic works, the Arsenal, the Kebke factory and the Petichev engineering works.²⁴ Only very occasionally did workers admit that some degree of evacuation might be inevitable in view of the fuel, raw materials and transport crisis, but even then, they stated that it was up to workers to decide if and how evacuation should be carried out.²⁵

In the autumn some factory owners began surreptitiously to move equipment out of their factories. Factory committees did not confine themselves merely to vituperating these owners, they actively thwarted their manoeuvres. In September the Putilov administration attempted to send machinery by canal to Saratov, but the works committee held up the barge for a month until the administration had proved to their satisfaction that the machinery was not needed in Petrograd.²⁶ At the Pipe Works management planned to remove operations to Penza, Voronezh and Ekaterinoslav, transferring 4,000 machines, 20,000 workers and about 40,000 members of their families. When the works committee visited these places, however, they discovered that none of them was ready to receive the evacuees and that, in reality, management intended to transfer only 1,281

23. Pravda, 64, 24 May 1917, p.4.

24. Pravda, 65, 25 May 1917, p.4; Pravda, 68, 28 May 1917, p.4; Pravda, 93, 29 June 1917, p.4; DeTo Naroda, 66, 4 June 1917, p.4.

25. See, for the example, the Aivaz resolution, Pravda, 92, 27 June 1917, p.4.

workers and fire the rest. Without hesitation, the works committee blocked the proposed plans.²⁷ Similar discoveries were made by factory committees at the Okhta explosives works and the Optics factory when they visited the sites to which their factories were to be evacuated.²⁸ At the Arsenal works^{and} the Okhta powder works the committees obstructed evacuation plans since they had been inadequately prepared.²⁹

By no means all factory committees opposed evacuation in principle. At the Parviainen works the Bolshevik-controlled works committee on 22 August drew up an agreement with management which specified in detail the terms of the transfer of operations out of the capital.³⁰ At the Baltic works the committee drew up emergency evacuation plans in case of German invasion, but censured a union representative on the government evacuation commission, who had admitted in a private conversation that there were too many workers at the factory, and had suggested that the superfluous ones be sent "to the Front or to the devil".³¹ At the Nevskii shipyard the works committee was fully involved in arrangements to remove the plant to Dubrovka and the Kamenskaya station.³² At the Admiralty works the committee kept a stern eye on the plans which were being drawn up and at Sestroretsk the Bolshevik works committee helped find a place to which the arms factory could be transferred.³³

27. Stepanov, op. cit., p.99; Rabochii Put', 7, 10 September 1917, p.3.

28. Stepanov, op. cit., p.100.

29. ibid.

30. Metallist, 3, 1 October 1917- p.16.

31. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 336, 342, 349, 378, 391.

32. Payalin, Zavod im. Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1933, p.397.

33. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 91, 95; 593.

The official position of the factory committee movement was to oppose plans for evacuation. This was the line which was propagated by the Bolshevik party. At the Third Conference of Factory Committees on 10 September Skrypnik poured obloquy on government evacuation plans. The conference passed a resolution which argued that the practical difficulties of setting up factories in new areas without a proper social and industrial infrastructure were enormous; that the transport system could not bear the strain of evacuation; that it would be too costly and amounted, in effect, to a counter-revolutionary plot. The resolution argued that the way out of the crisis lay in a revolutionary popular government bringing the war to a close. The resolution, however, did allow for partial evacuation of single enterprises, so long as this was done under strict workers' control, with the full consent of the workforce, and so long as three months' redundancy pay was given to those who did not wish to move.³⁴

The attitude of the trade unions was more or less in line with that of the factory committees though there was greater willingness to recognise that evacuation might not always be against the interests of the working class. In May the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions strongly attacked the evacuation plans and persuaded the workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet to do likewise.³⁵ Interestingly, however, the metalworkers' union did not share the general antipathy to evacuation. At a meeting in May of the union

34. Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Fabzavkomy, vol. 2, M., 1927, pp. 35-6.

35. Pravda, 65, 25 May 1917, p.3; Pravda, 71, 2 June 1917, p.3; DeTo Naroda, 58, 26 May 1917, p.4; Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 2, 15 September 1917, p.10.

board it was unanimously agreed that:

we should broaden the partial question (of 'relief', SAS) to include the general regulation of the whole of our national industry. We thus insist on the immediate creation of a national centre of regulation, on which the representatives of organised labour will have a big say in deciding questions about the organisation of the economy.³⁶

Later the Bolshevik V. Schmidt persuaded the union to take a more critical position, but the union shifted back to its original position in July, justifying evacuation by the argument that "the ruin of the national economy would lead to the destruction of the revolution".³⁷ At the beginning of September the union managed to persuade the PCTU of the necessity of limited evacuation under workers' control.³⁸ By the beginning of October the metal union, the PCTU and the Petrograd Soviet had moved to a far less intransigent position on the question of evacuation than the CCFC, which better fitted their more statist conceptions of regulating the economy.

The factory committees against redundancies

In the autumn of 1917 the factory committees of Petrograd became very active in fighting attempts at closure and redundancy. At the Baranovskii, Parviainen, Vulcan, Pulemet, Metal, Erikson, Siemens-Schuckert and Dynamo works, management plans for closure

37. Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g., L., 1928, p.123; Metallist, 4, 18 October 1917, p.10.

38. Metallist, 5, 9 November 1917, p.3; Rabochii Put', 10, 14 September 1917, p.3.

39. Stepanov, op. cit., p.143.

were blocked by the works committees. At the Bar anovskii works management announced on 1 August 1,500 redundancies owing to fuel shortages. The committee responded by cutting working hours and transferring workers from one shop to another.³⁹ On 16 August management at the Vulcan works fired 633 workers and announced the closure of the factory on 7 September. When the factory committee discovered that there were stocks of fuel and raw materials to last six months, it accused the director of 'sabotage' and tried to have him removed from his post.⁴⁰ At the end of August management at Parviainen announced that 1,630 redundancies were in the pipeline, but the committee managed to defer them by ensuring a more economical use of remaining fuel supplies.⁴¹

At the Putilov works the administration had tried to lay off 1,200 workers as early as May, but it was not until the end of August that it tried in earnest to implement redundancies. It announced that 10,000 workers would lose their jobs as a consequence of fuel shortages.⁴² The works committee declared this unacceptable and began a desperate search for fuel. It managed to find some, but the administration could not afford to buy it. Workers and managers set up a commission to investigate production at the factory and came to the conclusion that 3,200, not 10,000, workers would have to lose their jobs. On 25 September members of the works committee met with the vice-president of the Commission on

39. Stepanov, op. cit., p.143.

40. ibid., p.142.

41. ibid.

42. Gaza, op. cit., pp. 386-7; Mitel'man, et al., op. cit., p.142.

Defence, Pal'chinskii, to discuss the fuel crisis and redundancies. He proposed a 'participation' scheme whereby workers would be given places on the new company board in return for implementing redundancies. The committee rejected this out of hand, since "workers cannot dismiss workers", but they conceded that some redundancies were necessary, since "we cannot allow the factory to become an alms-house".⁴³ On 10 October the works committee met with representations from the Peterhof district soviet and from the CCFC to discuss further the question of redundancies. Committee members were criticised for agreeing to one month's redundancy pay instead of two. The meeting agreed that workers should only leave voluntarily, though some felt that shop committees should pressurise the better-off workers into leaving.⁴⁴

Some factory committees did agree to redundancies since the alternative was complete closure. Many adopted a policy of making women workers redundant rather than men, either on a 'last in, first out' basis or because their sojourn in industry was seen as an essentially temporary phenomenon induced by the war. At the Arsenal works, the Nevskii shipyard, Lessner and Russian-Baltic works, the committees took steps to phase out female employment.⁴⁵ At the Baltic works the committee said that every effort would be made to find alternative work for women but if this were not available they would be dismissed.⁴⁶ At the Semenov wood factory

43. Gaza, op. cit., pp. 386-91; Rabochii Put', 32, 10 October 1917, p.4.

44. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 490-3.

45. Stepanov, op. cit., p.146.

46. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 267-311.

and at the municipal tram depot it was decided that women whose husbands worked at the workplace should be made redundant.⁴⁷ The same decision was taken by a general meeting of workers in the shrapnel shop at Putilov which, according to a woman who worked there, reflected the general contempt with which women were treated; however, Putilov works committee condemned the decision.⁴⁸ The CCFC and the Bolshevik party (particularly its women's paper, Rabotnitsa) took steps to prevent committees from discriminating against women in this way, but it is hard to say with what success.⁴⁹

On the whole, the attempt by the factory committees to block redundancies was very successful. Only two factories employing more than 500 workers were closed down in Petrograd prior to October - the Semenov engineering works and the Company for Precision Engineering Instruments.

Workers' control becomes more radical

As more and more jobs became threatened, the scope of workers' control expanded. Factory committees strengthened their control of fuel and raw materials and new forms of control began to appear. One of the most important of these was the effort to extend workers' control into the sphere of company sales and finances. Until June such control was a rare phenomenon.⁵⁰ Finance sub-committees existed

47. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 3, 12 December 1917, p.15; Karpetskaya, N.D., Rabotnitsy i velikii oktyabr', L., 1974, p.85.

48. Golos Rabotnitsy, 5-6, 17 June 1917, p.14.

49. See the article by K.N. Samoilova, Proletarii, 17 August 1917.

50. Selitskii, V.I., Massy v bor'be za rabochii kontrol', M., 1971, p.195.

in some factories, like the Pipe Works and the Okhta explosives works as far back as March, but they did little but organise the finances of the committees themselves. As early as May, however, Major-General Belaev, the director of the Izhorsk works, permitted the works committee to monitor financial operations and pricing policy.⁵¹ At the Russo-Belgian metallurgical company in June, 400 workers, threatened with loss of their jobs owing to the financial difficulties of the company, opened the company books to discover that orders were in a healthy state. They offered to guarantee the profitability of the company for the rest of 1917 if they were given the right to check company accounts, but management refused.⁵² At the Skorokhod shoe factory on June 13 the factory committee demanded details of incoming and outgoing orders.⁵³ At the Langenzippen engineering works the factory committee went so far in June as to attempt to stop the payment of dividends to shareholders, pending an enquiry.⁵⁴ The First Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees called for the abolition of commercial secrecy and the Central Council of Factory Committees, set up by that Conference, arrogated to itself wide powers of checking company accounts, calculating debts and credits, costs of production and rates of profit.⁵⁵ Yet, in spite of increased activity in this sphere, control of company finances remained an aspiration rather than a

51. Rabochii Kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatiyakh Petrograda, 1917-18gg., vol. 1, L., 1947, p.71 (henceforward Rabochii Kontrol').

52. Dmitriev, N., 'Petrogradskie fabzavkomy v 1917g', Krasnaya Letopis', 1927, no. 2 (23).

53. Rabochii Kontrol', p.108.

54. ibid., p.111.

55. Novyi Put', no. 1-2, 15 October 1917, pp. 9-10.

reality, because of the overriding influence of the banks. Banks were not subject to workers' control and so it was difficult to get hold of information about the financial state of a company. Nor were attempts by the Central Council of Factory Committees to ensure an efficient and equitable distribution of orders much more successful. The slump in demand and the dislocation of the market merely led to factory committees competing for scarce orders.

Attempts by factory-owners to close down their firms provoked workers in a few small factories to either remove the directors or to try to run the factories themselves. One of the first and most blatant attempts at 'sabotage' occurred at the tiny engineering shop, owned by V.I. Rykatkin, where 24 workers were employed. Between November 1915 and April 1917, Rykatkin had received about a million rubles in loans - mainly from the government - but the factory had completed orders worth less than 100,000 rubles. The War Industries Committee had already begun to investigate suspected speculation, when a row flared up at the factory on 2 May. The foreman refused to let Rykatkin fire one of his administrators and he, enraged at this attack on his "right to manage", determined to close his factory. To facilitate this, he secretly removed tools and equipment from the factory one night but was caught in the act. The Menshevik-dominated factory committee, in retaliation, refused Rykatkin entry into the factory and petitioned the government to sequester the enterprise:

Despite the fact that the enterprise is working on defence, the owner has conducted his business with extreme carelessness. He accepted orders only in order to get loans, but once he had got them, he cut back the fulfillment of the orders. He bought materials in insufficient quantities and what he bought he dumped on one side. He sold fuel which had been specially assigned for defence purposes. He transferred craftsmen, without the knowledge of the workers, and there were instances when he provoked soldiers at the factory against the workers.⁵⁶

The Ministry of Labour at first tried to persuade the committee to take back Rykatkin, but at the end of July acceded to the demand for sequestration.⁵⁷ At the Semenov machine-construction plant at the end of June, management for the second time attempted to close the plant because of lack of capital and low labour productivity. It petitioned the government for a 500,000 rubles subsidy and the government agreed to transfer orders to the factory. The factory committee in turn agreed to try to raise labour productivity, but only on condition that it be allowed to establish a control commission with wide powers. By August, however, the factory had closed down, putting 700 workers out of jobs.⁵⁸

Small factories were the first to feel the brunt of the economic crisis, and in order to prevent closure, one or two factory committees in small enterprises tried to run the factories themselves. These first experiments in self-management were not inspired by syndicalist utopianism: they were designed to save jobs. They were fairly well-

56. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.146.

57. The case is documented in detail in Krasnyi Arkhiv, 69-70, 1935, pp. 138-58.

58. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, pp. 150-1; 172-4.

organised experiments and the committees concerned liaised with the relevant labour organisations and with the Ministry of Labour. Indeed there is a strong suggestion in the Brenner, Slyusarenko and Langenzippen cases that self-management was not so much an end in itself as a means of forcing the government to take responsibility for the enterprise (so-called 'sequestration'). At the Brenner copper-smelting and engineering works the owner informed the factory committee on 19 May that he had no funds left and begged it to help him expedite outstanding orders as quickly as possible. The committee agreed to do this, but five days later Brenner announced that he was going to shut the factory for two weeks. The committee objected to this, since the factory had received advances of 420,000 rubles from the War Industries Committee for orders which had not yet been completed. The committee therefore decided to dispense with Brenner and run the factory themselves. On 6 June they issued an appeal to the Ministry of Labour and to the Petrograd Soviet:

In view of the fact that the owner of the factory has not appeared since 24 May, and that the factory has been working under the supervision of the factory committee, we are now seeking your permission to run production, to receive and fulfil orders, both state and private, and to continue production when those state orders begun under Brenner have been finished and despatched to the institutions from which they were received. Without your permission, the committee will be deprived of the possibility of continuing production at the factory and this will make it difficult for the workers to receive their wages.⁵⁹

59. Krasnyi Arkhiv, 105, 1940, p.109.

On 16 June the Peterhof district soviet agreed to check the accounts of the Brenner works and to make an inventory of stock. It later agreed to oversee an experiment in self-management, putting the Brenner deputy to the soviet in charge of operations at the factory.⁶⁰ However the factory was desperately short of capital and the committee turned to other factory committees for help. The Triangle works lent the factory 15,000 rubles and the Putilov works sent some raw material, but this did not really help. At one stage the committee began negotiations with Brenner about his possible return as director, but his terms proved unacceptable. By August productivity was sliding fast, workers were not receiving their wages and drunkenness was on the increase. On 24 August the commissar of the local militia reported to the Peterhof soviet that he had received an order from the government to eject the workers from the factory.⁶¹ The committee then turned

again to the government to demand sequestration. After pressure from the CCFC, the government agreed in September to place the factory in charge of the Factory Convention.⁶² At another small enterprise in the early summer, workers discussed the possibility of taking over production. At the V.A. Lebedev airplane factory in late May the workers put forward a large wage demand which management refused to countenance. A general meeting was then called at which the Socialist Revolutionaries of the factory called for the wage claim to be referred to the conciliation chamber. They

60. Raionnye Sovety Petrograda v 1917g., vol. 2, M.L., 1965, pp. 184-6.

61. ibid., pp. 249, 259, 263.

62. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v iyule, M., 1959, pp. 342-3;
Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p. 147.

agreed that, as a last resort, if management proved recalcitrant, they should demand the removal of the director. Another group of workers, however, demanded the immediate expulsion of the director "for disseminating false rumours aimed at disorganising the workers and employees of the factory". They won the toss and the workers forced the removal of the director from the board of the company. On 2 June another general meeting was summoned at which a call was made for workers to take over the running of the factory themselves. Some pointed out that this was impractical, since they did not have any capital to continue operations. A worker by the name of Tamsin proposed the following resolution: "We empower the factory committee to take over the running of the factory by itself, to inform the board of this step and to invite a government commissar to the factory and to inform the metalworkers' union". The SR chairman of the factory committee resigned at this point and the next day the SR factory cell called a meeting which the Bolsheviks refused to attend. This meeting agreed that "the question of transferring the factory into the workers' hands cannot be decided by an open vote, but only by a secret ballot of all comrade-workers, so that each worker considers himself responsible for the decision". A member of the City Soviet was called to the factory and he eventually dissuaded the workers from taking over the factory, leaving it in charge of the board of directors.⁶³

The sheer practical difficulties of running a factory seem to have discouraged factory committees from any attempt at complete

63. De lo Naroda, 8 June 1917, p.4.

takeover. Seizure of an enterprise by workers - so-called 'socialisation' - was a rare phenomenon prior to the October Revolution.⁶⁴ Where workers attempted to remove the official administration, it was invariably after a bout of bitter conflict and their aim was usually to force the hand of the government into taking responsibility for the factory. At the Slyusarenko airplane factory the owner closed down operations in July after stalemate had been reached in wage negotiations. A general meeting of the 227 workers resolved to bar the owner from the premises and pressed the Ministry of War to take direct charge of the factory.⁶⁵ At the Langenzippen engineering works the administration announced on 2 June that the factory would have to close since production had fallen by a third, owing to a shorter working day, a 50% decrease in labour productivity and a fuel shortage. Three days later, the factory committee replied that in view of management's refusal to recognise the workers' commission of control, its abrogation of pay agreements and the proposed closure, the committee intended to institute strict control of materials, to make its decisions binding on management, to check all management decisions, to examine all correspondence and to strengthen security in the factory. It turned to the Central Council of Factory Committees to ask for its support in a bid to get the government to take over the factory but government refused. It was not until 1918 that the committee finally ejected the director and simultaneously rejected the commissar appointed to the factory by the Bolsheviks.⁶⁶

64. In the Urals, however, factory seizures were quite widespread by the autumn of 1917.

65. Stepanov, op. cit., p.135.

66. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.148; Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku, M., 1923, p.245.

The demand for state takeover was by no means an index of the political radicalism of an enterprise. At the Respirator factory, for example, where 7,000 workres were employed making gas masks, the factory committee as late as September couched its demand for government sequestration in the language of revolutionary defencism:

We have made clear our position regarding the sabotage of our factory by the administration, which has gone away at this most pressing and critical moment. We consider this to be an act of desertion of the home front. In order not to disrupt or harm production of gas masks for the Front, and in order that the factory can work normally - in spite of the eight-day absence of the administration - we unanimously resolve:-

As circumstances will not permit of any delay, to demand the immediate appointment of a commissar to take care of the legal side of things and that he be someone neutral.

The works committee and shop stewards' committee take responsibility for production and maintaining output...

In no circumstances must our factory be subject to the War Industries Committee, but to the state. We demand that the administration, which is guilty of desertion, be handed over to a democratic court...⁶⁷

As workers' control became more aggressive and expansionist, opposition to it from factory owners hardened. Everywhere employers began to resist "interference" by factory committees and to reassert their "right to manage". Attempts by the Society of Factory and Works Owners to confine the activities of the committees to the area demarcated by the law of 23 April failed dismally. Employers therefore tried to constrain the committees in other ways. They attempted to stop them meeting during working hours. They threatened

67. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre, M., 1961, pp. 284-5.

to stop paying wages to committee members. They deprived committees of premises in which to meet and threatened individual members with dismissal or conscription into the army.⁶⁸ More significantly, the SFWO put pressure on the Ministry of Labour to use its legal powers to curb the ambitions of the committees. Anxious to meet objections from employers and to be seen to be doing something, the Ministry of Labour took steps to limit workers' control. On 23 August it issued a circular affirming that the right of hiring and firing workers belonged exclusively to the employers. A week later it issued a second circular which forbade factory committees from meeting during working hours. The circulars provoked uproar in the labour movement, not least because they appeared at precisely the time when General Kornilov was organising to drown the revolutionary movement in blood. Meetings of workers at Putilov, the Admiralty works, the Cable works, Nobel and Lebedev works heaped opprobrium on the Ministry of Labour for capitulating to the counter-revolutionary demands of the employers.⁶⁹ At Langenzippen, the workers passed a resolution which said:

We reject with indignation the malicious slanders of the Ministry of Labour that the work of the factory committee lowers labour productivity. The factory committee declares that... 1) Skobelev's circular has a purely political character and is counter-revolutionary. It prevents the labour movement from following an organised course and supports the organised march of the counter-revolution, which aims to sabotage industry and reduce the country to famine. 2) We are forced to conclude that in the present context (of Kornilov) the Ministry for the 'protection of labour' has been converted into the Ministry for the protection

68. Volobuev, op. cit., pp. 266, 269.

69. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 171, 181-3, 190; Stepanov, op. cit., p.151.

of capitalist interests and acts hand in hand with Ryabushinskii to reduce the country to famine, so that the 'bony hand' may strangle the revolution."⁷⁰

At the Obukhov works a general meeting declared:

We consider the existence of the factory committees to be a matter of life and death for the working class. We believe that the implementation of Skobelev's circular would mean the destruction of all the gains of the working class. We will fight with all our might and by all means, including the general strike, for the existence of our factory committees."⁷¹

The Third Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees was an emergency conference summoned on 10 September to discuss the circulars. It roundly condemned them, jeering at Kokokol'nikov's pathetic attempts to explain away the circulars on behalf of an embarrassed Ministry of Labour.⁷²

Some employers saw the circulars as a green light to go ahead and bring the factory committees to heel. At the Skorokhod shoe factory and the Aivaz engineering works the managements announced that they were going to stop paying members of the factory committee and stop their interference in hiring policy.⁷³ On 1 September the administration at Vulcan announced that it intended to halve the

70. Browder and Kerensky, op. cit., vol. 1, p.723. The allusion is to a speech made by Ryabushinskii, the textile magnate, to the Congress of Trade and Industry, in which he warned that 'the bony hand of hunger and national destitution will seize by the throat the friends of the people'.

71. Stepanov, op. cit., p.151.

72. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 2, pp. 18, 27-8.

wages bill of the factory committee. The committee resisted and was fully supported by the workers, who, going further in their resistance than the committee wished, clamoured for the removal of the director. After several weeks' bitter conflict, the wages of committee members were restored to their former level.⁷⁴ At the Nevskii footwear factory management persisted for a week in trying to stop meetings during working hours and in refusing to pay workers appointed to guard the factory, but then gave in.⁷⁵ In general, labour organisations in Petrograd were strong enough to stymie efforts by employers to constrain them, and in most factories employers do not seem to have thought it worth trying. As early as 12 September the SFWO recommended that its members continue to pay an average wage to factory committee members "in connection with the exceptional circumstances of the present period". Ten days later, in an effort to undo the damage which it had already caused, the Ministry of Labour ordered employers to pay members of the committees, and was duly condemned by the Chief Committee of United Industry for its pains.⁷⁶

After the failure of attempts to curb workers' control by legal means, employers were thrown onto the defensive. By September workers' control had been transmogrified from an essentially defensive tactic of maintaining production into an offensive means of forcing employers to keep open their factories come what may. The dominant feeling amongst employers was aptly summed up by Torgovo-Promyshlennaya Gazeta: "The sole dream of the industrialist

74. ibid. and Rabochii Put', 31, 8 October 1917, p.4.

75. Rabochii Put', 7, 10 September, pp. 3-4.

76. Volobuev, op. cit., p.276.

has become to give up business and to close his enterprise, if only for a short time. If cases of closure are not so numerous, it is only because the threat of mob law, sequestration and unrest hangs over him".⁷⁷

The dynamic of the movement for workers' control was relentlessly forward-moving. To use Trotsky's parlance, the demand for workers' control was a "transitional" demand, stemming from the immediate practical needs of workers but pushing them ever forward into battle with capitalism itself. Workers' control implied a kind of "dual power" in the factory which, like "dual power" at state level, was intrinsically unstable and necessitated resolution at the expense of one class or another.⁷⁸ As the workers' control movement grew in power in the autumn of 1917 it came to pose in a sharp way the problem of whether workers could "control" production without taking some responsibility for it. This question had been dealt with as early as March 13 by the conference of representatives of twelve Artillery enterprises, which had taken a clear stance:

In order to carry out this preliminary (predvaritelnyi) control, the works committee sends representatives onto the administrative organ of factory management and onto the economic and technical committees and also into every section of the factory. All the official documents of management, all estimates of production and expenditure and all incoming and outgoing papers must be presented to members of the works committee for their information.

Addendum: Not wishing to take responsibility for the technical and administrative-economic organisation of production under present conditions, the works committee representatives go into factory management only for advisory purposes, until such time as the economy has been fully

77. Torgovo-Prömyshlennaya Gazeta, 213, 1 October 1917, p.1.

78. Trotsky, L., The Struggle against Fascism in Germany, London: Pelican, pp. 35-6. Trotsky incorporated the demand for workers' control of production into the Transitional Programme of the new Fourth International in 1938.

socialised.⁷⁹

This position was reiterated by the conference of works committees under the Artillery Department on 17 October. The resolution passed by the conference affirmed:

responsibility for production lies exclusively with the administration...but the works committees have the right of control, which means that the works committee, in the shape of its control commission, has the right to attend all board meetings and to demand exhaustive information.⁸⁰

This was the official policy of both the factory committees and the Bolshevik party on this matter, i.e. to demand that workers have a majority of places on all organs of management - for purposes of 'control' of management decisions - but to refuse to accept any responsibility for decisions taken. However, as workers intervened more deeply into management, it became more difficult to avoid taking responsibility. In extreme cases where the factory committees actually ejected management, they either took responsibility for production or the factory closed.

This problem greatly exercised the committee at the Putilov works. As early as June the committee had gone to the Ministry of Labour to demand a new administration, and discussions had taken place within the committee as to the number of workers' representatives that should sit on the new company board. Most of the committee

79. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.34.

80. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, p.127.

held that workers should demand a two-thirds majority of the eighteen places on the board in line with official factory committee policy, but the Bolshevik chairman, Vasil'ev, believed that this would vest workers with responsibility for production willy-nilly.⁸¹

On 25 September members of the works committee met with the vice-chairman of the Defence Commission, Pal'chinskii, to discuss the state of production at Putilov. He proposed that a joint control commission of workers and management be established to supervise the running of the factory and to take charge of cutting the workforce and raising productivity. The majority of Bolsheviks and Menshevik-Internationalists on the works committee rejected this proposal, since they were unwilling to take responsibility for sackings and redundancies; instead they called for strict 'control' of the company board.⁸² At the same time, however, they agreed to sit on the joint control commission, without taking responsibility for its decisions; but as Vasil'ev pointed out, it was extremely difficult to differentiate 'control' from 'responsibility' at this level:

Assuming the functions of control, we will be drawn unwillingly, but quite naturally, into the sphere of operations and of factory productivity, into a sphere which is very ticklish from the point of view of preserving the principles of revolutionary democracy and observing the principles of class struggle.⁸³

81. Fleer, M., 'Putilovskii zavod v 1917-18gg., Bor'ba klassov, 1924, 1-2, p.294.

82. Gaza, op. cit., pp. 386-91.

83. ibid., p.389. Vasil'ev said this at a works committee meeting which Gaza dates as having taken place on 11 September. This cannot have been the case; the meeting probably took place shortly after 27 September.

Clearly workers' control was running into contradictions, caused by the coexistence of profound economic dislocation and private ownership of industry. On the one hand, the prospect of mass unemployment encouraged the works committee at Putilov to take greater responsibility for production; on the other, because the company remained in private hands, the committee felt it should confine itself to merely overlooking company activities.

The All-Russian Conference of Metalworkers, called to discuss the union wages contract on 15 October pondered further the nature of the 'control' which should be exercised. The syndicalist, A.K. Gastev, opened the discussion, arguing forcefully that the factory committees were fooling themselves if they thought that 'control' could avoid entailing responsibility. Speakers debated the relative merits of 'informational' (osvedomitel'nyi) versus 'responsible' (otvetstvennyi) control and a clear majority spoke up for the latter. Although the conference took place only a week before the October uprising, the expectation of the delegates was that capitalism would continue and that the state would regulate production on an increasing scale. Control involving responsibility for decisions taken should therefore be exercised jointly by workers and management.⁸⁴ This scheme had the advantage of not ducking the thorny question of 'responsibility', but it is highly unlikely that it could have been implemented, given the depth of class antagonism. In the event it did not matter, for the Revolution intervened.

84. Vserossiiskaya tarifnaya konferentsiya soyuzov metallistov: protokoly, Pg., 1918, pp. 15-20.

The final thing to note is how the movement for workers' control came in the autumn of 1917 to pose questions of workers' self-management. Although the main impulse behind the expansion of workers' control was practical rather than ideological-motivated by the desire to save jobs rather than to enact some socialist or syndicalist blueprint - the practical impulse began to merge with the impulse to democratise factory life, which had been set in motion by the February Revolution. As early as the first factory committee conference in May, one or two delegates had argued for workers' control of production not merely as a way of bringing order into the economy, but as a preparation for socialism and for workers' self-management. Naumov, a Bolshevik metal worker from the New Parviainen works, had argued:

Control is not yet socialism, nor even the taking of production into our own hands, but it does still go beyond the framework of the bourgeois system...Our task at the present moment is to organise production so that workers will enjoy the best working conditions. We must bring production out of chaos into order...Having established ourselves in production, having taken control into our hands, we will learn, through practice, to work actively in production and to develop it in an organised fashion towards future socialist production.⁸⁵

By the time the first national conference of factory committees took place in October, this was a more pronounced theme. Although the resolution passed by the conference was, as we saw in the previous chapter, committed to a perspective of 'state workers' control' and was highly practical in its recommendations for combatting economic disorder, it nevertheless began as follows:

85. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.126.

Having overthrown autocracy in the political sphere, the working class will aspire to achieve the triumph of the democratic system in the sphere of production. The idea of workers' control, which arose naturally in the circumstances of economic ruin created by the criminal policy of the ruling classes, is the expression of this aspiration.⁸⁶

After the Bolshevik seizure of power the emphasis on the democratic aspect of workers' control was to come to the fore.

86. ibid., vol. 2, p.186.

9. FACTORY COMMITTEES VERSUS TRADE UNIONS

A. THE DEBATE ABOUT THE RESPECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES AND TRADE UNIONS

The emergence of a centralised apparatus covering the whole of Petrograd in both the trade unions and the factory committees, posed the problem of their respective spheres of competence. The first public discussion of this problem took place at the First Conference of Factory Committees at the beginning of June. Here a minority of trade unionists, led by the Mezhraionets, Ryaza/nov, (soon to join the Bolshevik party) and the Menshevik, V.D. Rubtsov, argued that there was no room for two labour organisations and that the factory committees should become the primary cells of the trade unions in the enterprise.¹ There is no record of anyone at this Conference calling for the diametrical opposite, i.e. the replacement of the unions by the factory committees, though this was the sentiment of some syndicalists and rank-and-file metalworkers.² The majority of delegates agreed that both organisations had a role to play. The Bolshevik worker, Naumov, argued:

1. Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya i Fabzavkomy, vol. 1, M., 1927, p.132 (henceforward Okt. Rev. i Fab.).
2. At the Khar'kov conference of factory committees at the end of May many delegates expressed the view that the trade unions were superannuated organisations, fit only for the dustbin of history. A delegate from the works committee at the General Electrical Company declared: 'When the workers want to subordinate the factory committees, we say "Hands Off!" We are going the same way as you. It's time to finish the struggle with capital so that it ceases to exist.' Another delegate expressed the view that 'the unions are bankrupt throughout the world. Where they exist, they merely hold us back from struggle'. Cited by Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy Rossii v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku, M., 1923, p.254.

At present to turn the factory committees into departments of the trade unions in the factories, as Comrade Ryazanov proposes, seems impossible, in view of the fact that the factory committees have the special task of bringing order to the economic life of the factories and of implementing control - tasks with which the unions are not and cannot be concerned.³

The Bolshevik, V.V. Schmidt, on behalf of the PCTU, disagreed with Naumov, arguing that the control of production should now become the concern of the trade unions. An anodyne resolution was carried which by-passed the issues at stake and called merely for close liaison between the new CCFC and the PCTU.⁴

A week later, on 11 June the Central Board of the Petrograd Metalworkers' Union, which was divided about equally between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, issued a statement on the relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions. For the first time a large union called unequivocally for the strict subordination of the factory committees to the unions:

The union is the highest and only organisation responsible for the conduct of workers in a particular branch of production. It alone has the right to put demands on the organisations of capitalists and the state on behalf of the whole profession. It alone has the right to conduct either general or partial disputes. It alone may put demands on the state concerning social security. It alone can express the will of the whole profession on questions concerning the forms of regulation and control of production... Local factory committees occupy a position of subordination to the trade union, within the general framework of organisation of the branch of production...but the overall structure of the union must be made more complex by involving the factory committees, so that the union combines within it-

3. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.135.

4. ibid., p.136.

self the organisation of its members by branch of production and...by enterprise. However, the central organisation of the whole trade union must be constituted so that the preponderance of union representatives over individual factory representatives is guaranteed. The strength of factory committee representation must be broadest where the union is acting as regulator and controller of production, and narrowest where the union is pursuing purely militant aims.⁵

This was a scarcely-veiled attack on the newly-created CCFC, opposing the factory committees' setting-up a centralised structure alongside that of the unions. It is interesting to note that these proposals concerning the interrelationship of the two organisations, pre-figured with uncanny accuracy the inter-relationship which was to be established after October.

On 20 June the Third All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions opened in Petrograd - the first national conference of trade unions since the February Revolution. The 211 delegates comprised 73 Bolsheviks, 36 Mensheviks, 6 Menshevik-Internationalists, 11 Bundists, 31 non-fractional Social Democrats, 25 SR's, 7 members of no political party (others unknown). The moderate socialists commanded a majority. The Menshevik, Grinevich, introduced the discussion on the tasks of the trade unions. He argued that the basic task of the unions was to conduct the economic struggle of the working class, whose chief weapon within the framework of capitalism was the strike. He insisted that unions should not involve themselves in the regulation of production, as this was the job of the government. With regard to politics, he argued that they should support a democratic republic, the soviets and the

5. Metallist, 1922, 12, pp. 64-5.

socialist parties and call for an end to the war, but they should avoid getting directly involved in day-to-day political questions.⁶ There was much that the internationalist bloc could agree with in Grinevich's report, but on two points they were in violent disagreement. The first concerned trade union involvement in politics; the second concerned workers' control of production and the tasks of the trade unions.

The internationalists excoriated the Menshevik rapporteurs, N. Garvi and Astrov, for their support of state control as opposed to workers' control. The primacy which they attached to the struggle for workers' control led them to adopt a peculiar position with regard to the factory committees. The Bolshevik spokesman, N. Glebov-Avilov, in effect, argued that the job of workers' control was too important to be left to the factory committees, that it should be taken over by the trade unions and that the factory committees should be subordinated to the trade unions: "The factory committees must be the primary cells of the unions. Their activities in the localities must be made dependent on the economic-control commissions of the unions".⁷ This adumbrates the position adopted by the Bolsheviks after October, but is totally at variance with the line taken by the First Conference of Factory Committees. The position adopted by the Mensheviks, which was accepted by Conference by 76 votes to 63 votes, was even more peculiar. The Mensheviks, of course, disliked the factory committees, but so opposed were they to the trade unions becoming involved in the work of controlling production, that they

6. Tret'ya konferentsiya professional'nykh soyuzov, M., 1927, pp.76-88.

7. ibid., pp. 484-5.

insisted that the factory committees take responsibility for this. At the same time, they called on the unions to turn the factory committees into their supports (opornye punkty) in the localities and to execute their policies through them. Thus the position adopted by the Conference was to subsume the committees into the union, whilst allowing them to embroil themselves in the futile folly of workers' control.⁸

Meanwhile within the metalworkers' union an ideology of what might be termed 'productivism' was gaining ground, which emphasised that the concerns of the trade unions were no longer merely with the defence of workers' interests, but with the regulation of the economy. On 21 July the Provisional Central Committee of the metal union passed a resolution based on the assumption, derived from Hilferding, that a new phase of state capitalism was coming into being. The resolution demanded widespread state monopolisation and trustification of production and distribution, and union representation on the Economic Council being set up by the government.⁹ The new emphasis on organising production seems to reflect partly the union's concern at the effects of demobilising the war industries, and also the fact that the union embraced large numbers of skilled workers who played a far more active role in production than did the 'mass production' workers.

A full discussion of the relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions took place at the Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees (7-12 August). Lozovskii, later a key advocate of the organisational subordination of the factory committees to

8. ibid., p.388.

9. Vsesoyuznyi Soyuz metallistov v resolyutsiyakh i postanovleniyakh s"ezdov i Konferentsii, vol. I, M., 1927, pp. 104-5.

the unions, put forward a position which was designed to bridge the divide between the two organisations. He argued that they both had different spheres of interest: trade unions were to defend the wages and conditions of labour and oversee the implementation of labour protection legislation; factory committees had the task of regulating production. He argued that:

The factory committees, uniting all the workers in each factory, embrace the whole working mass, whereas the unions embrace a narrower circle of organised workers who are aware of the necessity of professional unification. The committees unite workers who are divided along vertical lines; the unions unite workers divided along horizontal lines.¹⁰

In the last analysis, Lozovskii argued, the committees should be subordinate to the unions, insofar as they should be obliged to implement the latter's decisions at factory level and should not decide to strike without union permission.¹¹ This position was fiercely denounced by the anarcho-syndicalist, Volin, who lauded the factory committees as the only revolutionary organisations capable of pursuing the struggle of labour against capital and dismissed the trade unions as being eternally condemned to mediate between capital and labour.¹² He, in turn, was attacked by Voskov, the Bolshevik metalworkers' delegate from the Sestroretsk arms works, who argued that the factory committees:

cannot unite workers in the same way as the unions do. The whole fragmented mass of workers in a particular factory is included in the factory

10. Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, p.228.

11. ibid., p.229.

12. ibid., p.233.

organisation and if the factory closes, this organisation dissolves. The factory committee hangs by a thread, it can be replaced on the slightest pretext. The union unites the truly conscious, organised workers; it remains constant; the closure of individual factories does not undermine it.¹³

Lozovskii's resolution, proposing a division of labour between the unions and the factory committees, won the day. Volin's resolution gained a mere eight votes.¹⁴

On 20 October the All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees discussed once more the inter-relationship of the factory committees and the trade unions. The Bolshevik Ryazanov and the Menshevik Lin'kov, on behalf of the trade unions, accused the factory committees of separatism and called for their organisational subordination. They were particularly unhappy about the existence of the Central Council of Factory Committees alongside the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, and called for the disbandment of the former. They were bitterly opposed by the anarcho-syndicalist, Piontrovskii from Odessa and by the Left SR, Levin, from the CCFC, both of whom contrasted the vitality of the committees with the lassitude of the unions. The Bolshevik, V. Schmidt, from the metal-workers' union, conceded that the factory committees had a particular role to play in the sphere of control of production but wished to see them working under the auspices of the unions.¹⁵ The Bolshevik Skrypnik, from the CCFC, emphasised that there could at this stage be no question of making the committees the executive organs of the unions, but went some way towards placating the trade unionists by

13. ibid., p.231.

14. ibid., p.233.

15. ibid., vol. 2, p.193.

agreeing that the CCFC should collaborate with city organisations of trade unions in the realm of control of production.¹⁶

The Conference did not pass a resolution, so it is difficult to detect whether opinion was shifting towards acceptance of the idea of a merger of the two labour organisations. However, a nine-person commission did agree upon a resolution which, for the first time, went some significant way towards recognising trade union primacy over the committees. Whilst stressing the independence of the two organisations and the right of the factory committees to organise into a national structure, the commission's resolution called for the CCFC to include trade union representatives and for it to be given the status of a department of workers' control of the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions (ARCTU). In addition, it called for councils of factory committees to be established in each branch of industry which should become the section for workers' control of the respective industrial union. There is a certain vagueness about this resolution. It oscillates between the new idea of factory committees as a branch of the union and the old idea of a division of labour between two autonomous organisations.¹⁷ Clearly, the inter-relationship of these two organisations remained as unresolved as ever on the eve of the October uprising, and disagreements on the question polarised not along party lines but according to the institutional loyalties of factory committee and trade union leaders.

16. ibid., pp. 189, 193.

17. ibid., p.193. The Moscow conference of factory committees in October agreed upon a much greater degree of subordination of the committees to the unions. ibid., vol. 1, p.271.

B. DEMOCRACY AND BUREAUCRACY IN THE FACTORY COMMITTEES AND TRADE UNIONS

In view of the bureaucratic dictatorship which emerged out of the Russian Revolution, it is important to try to assess the degree of democracy which existed in the labour movement in 1917. What follows is an examination of the theory and practice of democracy in the trade unions and the factory committees, designed to shed light on the broader problem of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution.

a) Democracy in the Trade Unions

One usually thinks of 'democratic centralism' as the form of organisation espoused by the Bolshevik party, but the term was used widely in Russia to describe the structural mode best suited to all labour organisations. 'Democratic centralism' does not represent a set of organisational rules, so much as the vague principle of democratic involvement in decision-making, combined with centralised execution of all decisions made. This principle was accepted by both Mensheviks and Bolsheviks at the Third Conference of trade unions in June 1917 as being that which should underpin the organisational construction of the new union movement. It was intended to ensure "the participation of every member in the affairs of the union and, at the same time, unity in the leadership of the struggle."¹⁸ In the large factory unions, democratic centralism came to be realised as follows: power rested in the union board, which, in theory, was elected by a council of delegates, each of whom

18. Tret'ya konferentsiya, pp. 446-7.

represented and was elected by the workers in the individual factories. Centralisation was expressed in the fact that the central board ran the union on a day-to-day basis. In the metal-workers', printers' and leatherworkers' unions, boards also existed at district level, but they did not have the right to act independently of the central city board: nor did professional sections in those unions, such as the leatherworkers' and foodworkers', where they existed. The central board controlled union funds, to which local branches were expected to pay 10% of their assets.

Centralism should also have meant that the PCTU had jurisdiction over all union boards, but individual unions tended to assert their autonomy of this all-union body, being lax in the payment of levies to the PCTU etc.¹⁹ The supposedly supreme central body of the trade-union movement - the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, set up by the third conference - gave relatively little leadership to the unions in practice.²⁰

Democracy in the unions operated via the delegate councils. These councils elected the boards of the larger unions,²¹ though in smaller unions, including the printers', the boards were elected by the whole membership. The boards, whilst responsible for the day-to-day running of the union, had to refer all major policy questions to the delegate councils and could be overruled by them. Printers'

19. Professional'noe Dvizhenie v Petrograde v 1917g., L., 1928, p.60.

20. Milonov Yu. K., ed., Putevoditel' po rezolyutsiyam vserossiiskikh s"ezdov i konferentsii professional'nykh soyuzov, M., 1924, p.57.

21. On 4 June 300 delegates from 26 textile mills met to elect a board of 16 for the textile union. They agreed that the delegate meeting was the sovereign body in the union and should meet no less than once a month. Tkach, 1, November 1917, p.28.

and metalworkers' delegates, for example, approved the union wage contracts and supervised negotiations. The woodturners' delegate council began and ran the strike in October. Delegates were expected to coordinate the work of the union, to call general meetings and to keep members informed of what was happening. In practice it proved rather difficult for union delegates to involve members at factory level in union business.

Workers did not always have a choice about joining a union. In the metal industry the question of joining the union was usually put to a general meeting of workers and the factory voted to join the union en bloc.²² On 8 May the delegate council of the woodturners' union threatened to expel from the factories any worker who refused to join the union.²³ This 'closed shop' policy, however, was not the norm. A sizeable minority of workers remained outside the unions, of whom a large number were women. Rabotnitsa frequently complained that women regarded unions as organisations for men; and the leather workers' union set up special women's commissions in an attempt to attract peasant women into the union.²⁴ On the whole, however, low-paid workers did join the unions as an elementary insurance policy against starvation and unemployment, but they were unlikely to be involved in union activity in the workplace. The woodturners' union sent out a questionnaire to factories, asking whether workers attended union meetings. The majority of the 80 replies said 'yes', though some said 'weakly', 'lazily' or 'seldom', and others 'not

22. Metallist, 1922, 12, p.63.

23. Ekho derevoobdebchnika, 2, 19 October 1917, p.12.

24. Rabotnitsa, 4, 30 May 1917, p.6; Golos Kozhevnik, 2-3, 7 October 1917, pp. 8-9.

always' or 'not everyone'. Attendance was best at factories with active socialist cells.²⁵ This suggests that, in part at least, mass involvement in the unions was dependent on the active encouragement of workplace militants. This is borne out by a complaint which appeared in the metalworkers' journal about the behaviour of some factory delegates:

If the central and district boards (of the union) are responsible to the meetings of (factory) delegates, then the delegates themselves are responsible to nobody. The majority of delegates, once elected, do not fulfil their duties, they do not recruit members, they do not collect subscriptions and do not even appear at delegate meetings...All the time we observe a host of instances where the majority of our members are not aware of the policies and decisions of the central organs...Naturally such ignorance at times causes apathy in the membership. Often one feels that the central organs of the union are totally cut off from the mass of the members. This threatens to turn the central organisation into a bureaucracy.²⁶

It would be wrong to conclude from this that trade unions in Petrograd in 1917 were bureaucratic organisations. A trade-union bureaucracy in the literal sense did not exist in 1917. It is true that the Petrograd metalworkers' union had about 100 full-time officials by summer, but they lacked a bureaucratic esprit de corps: their commitment to democracy was sincere. Democracy functioned in the unions at the level of the delegate councils, these met regularly and closely monitored the activities of the union boards. At factory level, however, it was a different story; the union depended on the activism and expertise of workplace militants to involve the

25. Ekho derevoobdelochnika, 2, pp. 6-7.

26. Metallist, 7, 16 December 1917, p.2.

mass of members but it seems to have been an uphill battle to try to create unions with an active rather than passive membership.

b) Democracy in the Factory Committees

In contrast to the trade unions, factory committees were regarded by rank-and-file workers as "their" organisations. Whereas trade unions embraced the workers in a branch of industry, the factory committees embraced the workers in a single enterprise. Whereas trade unions were based on skilled workers, factory committees were elected by all the workers of the enterprise. Because of this the factory committees were the more popular organisation. The SR, I. Prizhelaev, wrote:

The factory committees have the crucial merit of being close to the worker, accessible, comprehensible to everybody - even the least conscious. They are involved in all the minutiae of factory life and so are a wonderful form of mass organisation...The trade unions are less accessible because they appear to stand further away from the rank-and-file worker.²⁷

7,000 workers at the Respirator factory on 3 September described the factory committees as "the best mouthpieces of the working class and the only real and true reflection of the moods of the toiling people".²⁸

A factory committee was elected by a general factory meeting, though shop stewards' committees usually consisted of delegates elected by individual shops. Unlike trade unions, which embraced only a proportion of the workforce and, in the early months of the

27. De'lo Naroda, 121, 8 August 1917, p.1.

28. Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v sentyabre, p.267.

Revolution, were sometimes created on a craft basis, the factory committees represented all the workforce in an enterprise. Every worker could vote in the election of the factory committee, regardless of job, sex or age. Any worker might stand for election, so long as he or she did not perform any managerial functions.²⁹ Elections were often by secret ballot³⁰ and at least half the workforce had to take part in them. Generally, members of the factory committee were elected for a year, although they could be recalled by a general meeting at any time. The Second Conference of Petrograd Committees, however, determined that the members should be elected for six months only and it also made provision for instant recall.³¹ Once elected, factory committees were expected to meet regularly. At the 1886 Electric Light Company the factory committee met every day, although the full factory committee might meet less regularly, where sub-committees dealt with much of the business. At the Gun works the committee met once every three days.³² Factory committees were required to report back to their membership on a regular basis. The Conference of representatives from state enterprises agreed on April 15 that factory committees should report to general meetings at least once a month.³³

29. In some factories such as the Putilov works, workers under the age of 20 were excluded from standing for election. Sviridov, A.A., 'Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety kak forma organizatsii peterskikh rabochikh v 1917g.', Uchenye Zapiski Leningradskogo gos. ped. In-t., vol. 298, 1971.

30. Secret ballots were stipulated by the conference of representatives of state enterprises on 15 April, by the statutes for factory committees published by the labour department of the Petrograd Soviet and by the Second Conference of factory committees, Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. 1, pp. 25, 32, 241.

31. ibid., p.241.

32. ibid., pp. 48,57-8.

33. ibid., p.30.

The extent to which the working-class movement was permeated by a commitment to far-reaching democracy is reflected in the fact that it was not the factory committee per se which was the sovereign organ in the factory, but the general meeting of all workers in the factory or section. It was this general assembly which passed resolutions on the pressing political questions of the day or decided important matters affecting the individual enterprise. The sovereignty of the general factory meeting was established in practice from the first and enunciated formally by the Second Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees on 12 August.³⁴ At the conference of representatives from state enterprises on 15 April it had been decided that general meetings of the factory workforce should take place at least once a month and should be called by either the factory committee or by one-third of the workforce.³⁵ The Second Conference of Petrograd lowered this requirement, by stipulating that one-fifth of the workforce might summon a general meeting which should be attended by at least one-third of the workers in order to be quorate. The Conference laid down that authority was vested in the workforce as a whole rather than in the committee.³⁶

Marc Ferro has argued recently that we should not allow ourselves to be bewitched by the far-reaching democracy of the paper constitutions of the popular organisations of the Russian Revolution: reality was a very different matter. He argues that long before October the popular organisations were undergoing a process of bureaucratisation 'from above' and 'from below'. Bureaucratisation 'from above' was particularly evident in the district soviets of Petrograd

34. ibid., p.240.

35. ibid., p.33.

36. ibid., p.240.

and was designed to prevent the breakdown of representation according to class. Bureaucratisation 'from below' was a process whereby each popular organisation - soviets, factory committees, Red Guards - sought to strengthen its position vis-a-vis the rest.³⁷ In the case of the factory committees, Ferro argues that the leadership of the movement became more entrenched and less accountable to the membership. Bureaucratisation 'from above' was manifest in a decline in the proportion of delegates at factory committee conferences elected from the factories and ⁱⁿ an increase in the proportion of 'bureaucratically appointed' delegates.³⁸ Bureaucratisation 'from below' was evident in the refusal of factory committee members on the ground to submit to reelection, and in the growing practice of inquorate meetings taking decisions.³⁹ I propose to explore how widespread

37. Ferro, M., October 1917, London: Routledge, 1980, ch. 7; Ferro, M., 'The Birth of the Soviet Bureaucratic System', Reconsiderations on the Russian Revolution, ed., Elwood, R.C., Ohio State University, 1976.

38. Ferro, M., October 1917, p.193. Ferro purports to show on the basis of the source cited below that the proportion of 'bureaucratically appointed' delegates to the Petrograd conferences of factory committees rose from 4% at the First; to 7% at the Second; to 12% at the Fourth. Using the same data, I calculate that the figures were respectively 12%, 7% and 10% - hardly evidence of growing bureaucratisation! The point is, however, that the 'bureaucratically appointed' delegates were not, in the main, party officials: they were representatives from the trade unions, soldiers' organisations and peasant soviets. One might regard their presence at the conferences as evidence of democratic courtesies being extended to other popular organisations, rather than of bureaucratisation. The final proof that there is nothing sinister about their presence, is that they were not allowed voting rights and thus were in no position to influence conference decisions (see Okt. Rev. i Fab., vol. II, pp. 217-264). Finally, my own sample does not support Ferro's claim that the factory committees sent the same people to the conferences; there seems to have been a high degree of turnover in the delegates to successive conferences (ibid.)

39. Ferro, M., October 1917, p.194.

bureaucratic practices by the factory committees were, by examining the proceedings of the Admiralty, Baltic and Sestroretsk works committees, which have been recently published in the Soviet Union. I propose to try to determine the extent to which factory committee members were an entrenched stratum by examining whether or not they submitted to reelection, ^{together with} other indices of 'bureaucratic' or 'democratic' behaviour where they seem pertinent.

Three factories made up the Admiralty works - two of them on Galernyi Island and the shell-manufacturing section in the Okhta district. At the main Admiralty works, SR's dominated the works committee in league with a Menshevik minority. The committee was not reelected between March and October, the few members who resigned being replaced by the runners-up in the March election. The committee met 94 times during this period; it rebuked sluzhashchie for not attending regularly and allowed women workers a special representative on the committee.⁴⁰ At the New Admiralty works the committee was also dominated by SR's, having been elected by secret ballot on 28 March. It elected its presidium three times between March and October.⁴¹ Both the Admiralty committees faced a rising tide of Bolshevik feeling among the workers on Galernyi Island after July, which expressed itself in vociferous demands for new elections to the soviets. The committees eventually arranged these for 27 September. 85% of the workforce took part, casting 1,295 votes for the Bolsheviks and 476 for the SR's, thus electing two Bolsheviks to the Petrograd Soviet and four Bolsheviks and one SR to the Kolomenskii district soviet.⁴²

40. Fabrichno-zavodskie komitety Petrograda v 1917g.: Protokoly, M., 1979, pp. 95-96 (henceforward Fab. zav. kom.).

41. ibid., pp. 114, 122, 125.

42. Rabochii Put', 36, 14 October 1917, p.4.

The Okhta shell section employed 1,330 workers, including 900 soldiers. It was one of the few places where the influence of the SR's and Mensheviks remained significant right up to October. The latter controlled the factory committee, which submitted for re-election at the end of July. Whenever a member of the committee resigned, the shop which was represented by that member was called on to elect a replacement.⁴³ Although the Okhta shop committee was the only one of the three Admiralty committees to be re-elected between March and October, all three committees appear to have operated in a reasonably democratic fashion.

At the Baltic works a majority of the 8,000 workers supported the Mensheviks and SR's until the July Days. In the second week of April the works committee organised elections to the Vasilevskii district soviet, at which Mensheviks and SR's swept the board.⁴⁴ In June, at the request of a general meeting, the committee arranged new elections to the Petrograd Soviet. It allowed any party or non-party group to put up a slate of candidates, providing it could muster fifty signatures. The slates were then published and voting took place by secret ballot.⁴⁵ The SR's and Mensheviks won a slight majority of votes, although the Bolsheviks made a better showing than in the March elections. Deputies were chosen on the basis of proportional representation. After July growing support for the Bolsheviks caused some shops to recall the Menshevik and SR deputies assigned to them, so that by the end of August there were no fewer than six Bolsheviks (compared to three SR's), representing the Baltic works

43. Fab. zav. kom., pp. 141, 160, 162.

44. ibid., p.210.

45. ibid., pp. 262-3.

in the city soviet. The committee decided that full-scale elections would have to be called, but these did not actually take place until after the Bolshevik seizure of power.⁴⁶

The original works committee was made up of non-party, SR and Menshevik members. The committee was re-elected in the second half of April and a handful of Bolsheviks got in for the first time.⁴⁷ At the end of July, however, a general meeting expressed no confidence in the committee. The committee rejected this vote of no confidence, but agreed to call shop meetings in order to find out what grievances the workers had against them.⁴⁸ On 15 September a general meeting demanded the immediate recall of the committee, whereupon the committee resigned.⁴⁹ Elections took place by secret ballot three days later and the Bolsheviks won a majority of the 40 places.⁵⁰ The metalworkers' union complained that three places on the committee had not been reserved for it, so the committee duly made them available.⁵¹ The evidence, on the whole, suggests that the committee behaved in a remarkably democratic fashion. It organised elections to the soviets and itself submitted to re-election twice, albeit with some reluctance since it had not served its term of office.

In the small town of Sestroretsk, 34 kilometres from Petrograd, the armaments works, which employed 6,200 workers, quickly won a

46. ibid., p.406.

47. ibid., pp. 220, 222.

48. ibid., pp. 311-2.

49. ibid., p.350.

50. ibid., pp. 355-7.

51. ibid., p.458.

reputation as a Bolshevik 'nest'. The Bolsheviks were in a minority on the first works committee; this set up a revolutionary commissariat in the town on 13 April, on which the Bolsheviks were also in a minority. At the end of May, the works committee arranged to hold elections in order to transform the commissariat into a fully-fledged soviet of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies, but it declared the election void when only about half the electorate bothered to vote. The committee issued a solemn warning to workers:

In view of the seriousness of the present moment, general factory meetings must be well-attended. It is the duty of every worker, as an honest citizen, to attend discussions of all questions concerning both the factory itself and the government in general.⁵²

The soviet elections were rescheduled for the end of July and the Bolsheviks won them overwhelmingly. On 1 August the works committee arranged new committee elections. 72% of the workforce voted in these elections, and on the basis of proportional representation the Bolsheviks won 8 places, the SR's 5 and the Mensheviks 2 places.⁵³

Re-elections of factory committees were common in the period up to October, contrary to Ferro's assertion. They took place at the Electric Light Company, the Pipe Works, Langenzippen, Skorokhod, Parviainen, Lessner, the Mint and Promet.⁵⁴ It is true that in

52. ibid., p.540.

53. ibid., p.574.

54. Oktyabr'skoe voornzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, pp. 102, 127. Data on the proportion of workers who took part in factory elections are too scanty to allow of generalisation. At the Pechatkin paper mill 57% of the workforce took part in factory committee elections in March. At the Old Lessner works 69% of the workforce took part in factory committee elections in Spetember, compared to 74% of the Pipe Works workforce a month later. 88% of the workforce at Parviainen took part in factory committee elections in August. In soviet

many factories the committees did not undergo re-election in the period up to October, but this cannot be seen as proof of bureaucratisation, since few had completed their six-month term of office. As the above survey shows, variation existed between different factories in the degree of democracy which operated and undemocratic practices were by no means unknown. Yet one is left with the general impression of a situation where, for a short period of eight months, a form of democracy flourished in the factories which was both direct and representational.

This is not to dispose of the problem of 'bureaucracy'. For, contrary to popular belief, 'bureaucracy' and 'democracy' need not be polar opposites. The terms 'bureaucracy' and 'bureaucratisation' have been deployed in a multiplicity of confusing and conflicting ways.⁵⁵ One line of thinking on bureaucracy, which goes back at least as far as Robert Michels, construes bureaucratisation as a process whereby the leaders of ostensibly democratic organisations acquire unregulated power in the interests of organisational efficiency and, in so doing, lose sight of the original goals of the organisation.⁵⁶ The preceding review of factory committee activity, does not suggest that they were in 1917 characterised by goal displacement and domination by an oligarchy. In contrast to Michels, Max Weber emphasises the inter-relationship of bureaucracy, ration-

elections in October, 85% of the Admiralty workers and 68% of the Promet workers turned out to vote. LGIA, f. 1186, op. 4, d. 16, l.2; Baklanova, I.A. and Stepanov, Z.V., 'Rabochie-metallisty Petrograda v dni velikogo oktyabrya', Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M.L., 1957, p.74; Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe v Petrograde (collection of documents), p.127; Rabochii, 6, 29 August 1917, p.4.

55. Albrow, M., Bureaucracy, London: Macmillan, 1970.

56. Michels, R., Political Parties, New York, Macmillan, Free Press, 1968.

ality and legitimate authority (Herrschaft) and his analysis appears to be more apposite to the factory committees. As argued in chapters 4 and 7, factory committees, far from being anarchic, protozoan bodies, as the conventional wisdom would have it, were solid, structurally-ramified organisations which functioned in a regular, routinised manner. To a certain extent, therefore, factory committees were 'bureaucratic', in the Weberian sense.⁵⁷ The duties of the factory committees and of their sub-commissions were fixed by rules and administrative dispositions; their activities were spelt out in written records; to a point, the committees followed "general rules which are more or less stable, more or less exhaustive and which can be learned". In other respects the committees operated in marked contrast to the Weberian model. There was no strict hierarchical system of authority, such that the lower levels of the factory committee movement were subordinate to the higher levels; though this was, arguably, the aspiration of the CCFC. The members of the factory committees in no way saw themselves as functionaries operating according to fixed rules. They were policy-makers in their own right who viewed their 'office' as a means of effecting economic and social change. They were not trained for office and enjoyed no stability of tenure. Finally, members of the factory were not appointed by some impersonal organisation, but elected by and accountable to the workers.

57. Weber's general concept of bureaucracy is most fully elaborated in chapter 8 of Weber, M., Economy and Society, vol. 3, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968, ch. 11.

Perhaps the most influential current of thinking on bureaucracy - at least in relation to the Soviet Union - is that which conceives of bureaucracy as a social stratum. This line goes back at least as far as Marx, who argued that the state bureaucracy functions to secure acceptance of the rules of the social order, by representing them in universal terms and maintaining them by force. For Hegel the state bureaucracy embodied the general interest, whereas for Marx the general interest was reduced to that of the bureaucracy, which required the permanence of particular spheres in order to appear as an imaginary universal.⁵⁸ The marxist conceptualisation of bureaucracy as both a product and a mediation of class conflict is at the heart of subsequent writing on the soviet bureaucracy.⁵⁹ Marc Ferro is clearly influenced by this tradition, in seeing the bureaucracy which arose out of the popular organisations of 1917 as a "new social grouping", characterised by a new source of income, a new role in society, a break with class origins, necessary solidarity with the Bolshevik party and dependency on the leading institutions.⁶⁰ He suggests that:

58. Albrow, *op. cit.*, and, especially, Lefort, C., Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie, Paris: Droz, 1971, pp. 287-292.

59. As early as 1918, the Menshevik Martov argued that a bureaucracy must necessarily emerge in Russia as a product of the irreconcilable contradiction between the tasks posed by the proletariat and the objective economic conditions and social relations of a backward peasant society (Martov, Yu., in God russkoi revolyutsii, M., 1918). The same line of analysis was pursued by the Workers' Opposition group in 1920-21 and was developed to its fullest extent by Trotsky, who construed the soviet bureaucracy as a distinct social stratum which had arisen because of the poverty of society in objects of consumption and which had appropriated political power in order to maintain unequal distribution of wealth, whilst defending the nationalised means of production. (Trotsky, L., The Revolution Betrayed, New York: Pathfinder, 5th edn., 1972. Trotsky is the progenitor of all subsequent theories of a 'new class' in the Soviet Union (for a review of these theories see Lane, D., The End of Inequality? London: Penguin, 1971).

60. Ferro. M., October 1917, pp. 196-7.

the so-called Stalinist period corresponds to the slow transfer of power from the old revolutionaries, with their mingling of tsarist officials, to the new apparatchiki coming from plebeian institutions such as raion committees (i.e. district soviets, SAS) and the Red Guard.⁶¹

An analysis of this stimulating thesis would take us far beyond the scope of the present work into 1930's. Mention is made of it merely in order to raise the question of whether or not the factory committee leadership represented a nascent bureaucracy in 1917, and also because Ferro's thesis coincides to a remarkable degree with an argument put forward by another historian of the factory committees, Chris Goodey.

Goodey argues that the factory committee layer "was closely associated from the very beginning with the attempt to build a new, centralised economic apparatus to raise the level of the productive forces".⁶² Just as Ferro argues that the district soviets and Red Guards provided the personnel for Stalin's political bureaucracy, so Goodey argues that the factory committees provided the key personnel for the economy bureaucracy (V.S.N. Kh. - the Supreme Council of National Economy) - for they most closely identified with Stalin's goal of 'industrialisation at all costs'.⁶³ Again, in order to do justice to this challenging thesis, one would have to go far beyond the scope of the present work, but a few brief comments would not seem out of place. Firstly, although it is not possible to estimate the number of former factory committee activists who went into the economic state apparatuses after 1917, the number was certainly minuscule. By the beginning of 1921,

61. ibid., 202; Ferro, Reconsiderations, p.129.

62. Goodey, C., 'Factory Committees and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', Critique, 3, Autumn 1974, p.39.

no fewer than 24,000 people were employed in the central apparatus of V.S.N.Kh.; a further 93,600 worked in provincial sovnarkhozy and 106,000 in uezd sovnarkhozy.⁶⁴ As early as August 1918, the proportion of workers in the central apparatus of V.S.N.Kh. was a mere 10%, the overwhelmingly majority of employees being former sluzhashchie, well-educated, under the age of 40 and not members of the Bolshevik party.⁶⁵ By 1922, the proportion of workers had shrunk even further, as a consequence of the expansion in size of the economic apparatuses. In that year workers comprised a derisory 2.8% of V.S.N.Kh. employees.⁶⁶ It is true that the proportion of workers in the higher levels of the economic apparatus was greater than this: in 1920, 26% of members of boards of glavki and economic centres were workers;⁶⁷ some of these would have had experience in the factory committees. At the very top level, we know that the Petrograd CCFC sent key members onto the V.S.N.Kh. at its foundation, including P.N. Amosov, N.K. Antipov, M.N. Zhivotov, V.Ya. Chubar' and N.A. Skrypnik.⁶⁸ But none of this evidence suggests that, overall, factory committee members were a major force within the

64. Gimpel'son, E.G., Velikii oktyabr' i stanovlenie sovetskoi sistemy upravleniya narodnym khozyaistvom, 1917-20gg., M.,

65. Drobizhev, V.Z., Glavnyi shtab sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti, M., 1966, pp. 225-7; Iroshnikov, M.P., Sozdanie sovetskogo tsentral'nogo gosudarstvennogo apparata: oktyabr' 1917 - yanvar' 1918, L., 1967, pp. 418-9.

66. Drobizhev, op. cit., pp. 230-1. It was only at the level of enterprise management that the proportion of workers was significant. A survey by the metal union in 1919 of 184 factories showed that workers comprised 64% of management board personnel. Gimpel'son, op. cit., p.285.

67. Gimpel'son, op. cit., pp. 285, 289.

68. Iroshnikov, op. cit., p.230.

economic apparatus. Those who went into the economic apparatus comprised a tiny proportion of factory committee activists in 1917, so it is extremely dangerous to generalise about the latter on the basis of the future careers of a tiny percentage of their number. Secondly, whilst Goodey is absolutely correct to insist that the factory committees aspired to a planned socialist economy, this aspiration cannot simply be equated with Stalin's goal. Socialist planning in 1917 was inextricably linked to workers' democracy - not normally reckoned to be one of Stalin's major concerns! Between 1917 and 1929 a lot of water flowed under the Liteinyi bridge: if a tiny handful of CCFC members went on to make careers for themselves in Stalin's economic bureaucracy, one cannot assume that this was their implicit destiny in 1917.

This overview of factory committee practice, in the light of different theories about bureaucracy, is not intended to dismiss the problem of bureaucracy as irrelevant to 1917. Indeed it is the major merit of the interpretations of Ferro and Goodey that, by raising the problem of bureaucracy in the context of 1917, they challenge one of the shibboleths of the contemporary Left in Western Europe, ie. the assumption that 1917 represents the golden age of innocence of the Russian Revolution, during which workers' democracy flourished unhampered, only to be stamped out after 1917 by a bureaucracy which arose through a combination of 'objective' social and economic factors and/or Bolshevik party policy. It has been the aim of the present work to show that far-reaching workers' democracy did indeed exist in 1917, but this does not mean that what Ferro calls the 'phénomène bureaucratique' was entirely absent.

In any large-scale democratic organisation elements of bureaucracy and democracy cohabit in uneasy tension. In order to implement its goals, a democratic organisation must develop some bureaucracy and a certain degree of autonomy from those who elected it, so that there are some spheres of day-to-day practical activity which are left to its discretion.⁶⁹ Within labour organisations bureaucracy also exists in another form, which has been succinctly analysed by Richard Hyman:

There is an important sense in which the problem of 'bureaucracy' denotes not so much a distinct stratum of personnel as a relationship which permeates the whole practice of trade unionism. 'Bureaucracy is in large measure a question of the differential distribution of expertise and activism: of the dependence of the mass of union membership on the initiative and strategic experience of a relatively small cadre of leadership - both 'official' and 'unofficial'...the 'bad side of leadership' still constitutes a problem even in the case of a cadre of militant lay activists sensitive to the need to encourage the autonomy and initiative of the membership.⁷⁰

We have already seen that in the Russian labour movement the dependence of the rank-and-file on the initiative and experience of the leadership was particularly acute, in view of the fact that the rank-and-file comprised unskilled or semi-skilled women and peasant workers unused to organisation. The skilled, proletarianised male leaders of the labour movement sought to bind these inexperienced workers into a disciplined unity, so that they might realise their democratic potential and exercise power on their own behalf. In practice, however, they ran the constant danger of dominating the rank-and-file. The balance between democracy and bureaucracy in this

69. Eisenstadt, S.N., 'Bureaucracy and Bureaucratisation', Current Sociology, vol. 7, 1958, p.102.

70. Hyman, R., 'The Politics of Workplace Trade Unionism', Capital and Class, 8, Summer 1979, p.61.

relationship depended on the economic and political conditions in society at large. So long as these conditions were favourable to the revolutionary goals which the labour leaders had set themselves, then democratic elements overrode bureaucratic elements i.e. the conditions were such that the popular forces could check the effectivity of bureaucratic forces. Once these conditions changed radically, however, as they did after October, bureaucratic elements came to the fore, which fostered the emergence of a bureaucratic social stratum dominating the whole of society. We shall briefly describe the political origins of this bureaucracy in chapter 12, where we shall see how the Bolshevik leaders of the factory committees, sincerely committed to workers' democracy but lacking working-class support, began to concentrate power in their hands, excluded the masses from information and decision-making and set up a hierarchy of functions. This may all suggest that bureaucratisation was inscribed in the revolutionary process in 1917, but if so, it was inscribed as a possibility only. It is not to pessimistically invoke some fatal 'iron law of oligarchy' (the implied position of Ferro). Democratic and bureaucratic elements existed in a determinate relationship in all popular organisations; this relationship was basically determined by the goals of the organisations and the degree to which those goals were facilitated by political and economic circumstances. These circumstances were to change dramatically in the autumn of 1917, and decisively shift the balance between the forces of democracy and bureaucracy—in favour of the latter.

10. THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND THE DEBATES ON THE FACTORY COMMITTEES AND TRADE UNIONS

A. PREPARING FOR OCTOBER

It is not the aim of this chapter to give an account of the Bolshevik seizure of power in October 1917 - this has been excellently done by other historians, but rather to concentrate on the debates about economic policy after power had been seized. In order to situate the debates about the transition to a socialist economy in their historical context, however, it is necessary to say a few words about the October insurrection and the events leading up to it, particularly about the role of the factory committees and trade unions in these developments. As the October Revolution was, in the first place, an armed seizure of political power, it is important to say something about the part played by these two organisations in the arming of the working class.

The failure of the July Days had led to a revival of the Red Guards i.e. the armed detachments of workers designed to strengthen the gains of the revolution and to combat the 'counter-revolution' in all its forms. The initiative to revive the Guards had come on 2 August when representatives from 18 Red Guard units elected a five-man commission (pyaterka) including the Bolshevik V.A. Trifonov and the anarchist Zhuk. This pyaterka, operating quite outside any party control, had begun to clandestinely train small numbers of Red Guards in the most militant factories and had staged a couple of daring raids on arms caches.¹ It was not until the Komilov

1. Startsev, V.I., Ocherki po istorii Petrogradskoi krasnoi gvardii i rabochei militsii, M.L., 1965, pp. 294-5.

It was not until the Komilov rebellion, however, at the end of August, that the formation of Red Guards began in earnest. The sudden epiphany of counter-revolution, conjuring up visions of Thiers' revenge on the Paris Commune, shocked thousands of workers into a realisation of the precariousness of the gains which they had made. They thus turned to the Bolsheviks who, ironically, were the chief beneficiaries of Komilov's bungled coup. During the critical days of 29-29 August, the Interdistrict Committee of district soviets oversaw the defence of revolutionary Petrograd,² and the factory committees took the initiative in setting up Red Guards. Workers were encouraged to join the Guard, but only with the recommendation of the committees or of a socialist party. At the Baltic Works the committee appointed a Bolshevik and a Left SR to instruct the factory Red Guard, and every recruit was given a revolver and a red armband.³ At Skorokhod the factory committee appealed to the Moscow district soviet to provide arms for its 362 Red Guards and forced management to provide them with boots.⁴ Weapons were in short supply, in spite of the fact that the factory committees and district soviets had largely failed to comply with a government directive to hand in all arms in the wake of the July Days.⁵ The works committees of the Sestroretsk and Schlüsselburg arms works did their best to provide the Red Guards with weapons and ammunition.⁶

2. ibid., pp. 148-9, 155.

3. Fabrichno-zavodski komitety Petrograda v 1917g., M., 1979, pp. 334-5; V boyakh, L., 1932, p.49.

4. Istoriya Leningradskogo ... obuvnoi fabrik, Skorokhod, L., 1969, pp. 153-4.

5. Startsev, op. cit., pp. 96-7; 'Iz istorii krasnoi gvardii', Istoricheskii Arkhiv, 1957, 5, p.129.

6. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo voornzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, p.175.

After the defeat of General Kornilov the number of Red Guards in Petrograd grew from about 12,000 to nearly 20,000 by the end of October.⁷ It became a familiar sight in the capital to see Red Guards 'square-bashing' around the factory yard after work.⁸ On 13 September a Central Command was set up, but it did not begin to function properly until October, when the Bolshevik Military Organisation finally began to take an interest in the Red Guards.⁹ Despite the existence of this Central Command and of a Department for the Workers' Guard, attached to the Soviet EC, no city-wide organisation of Red Guards operated before 22 October, when 110 Red Guard delegates met to establish a central body.¹⁰ The absence of a coordinated network of Red Guards at either city level or district level (except in Vyborg district) was probably one reason why the Military-Revolutionary Committee, set up on 9 October, chose to rely on Bolshevik regiments of soldiers, rather than on the Red Guards, when it began to organise the overthrow of the government. In addition, the Red Guards lacked the arms, experience and training which the soldiers had.

The role of the Red Guards in the events of 24-25 October was largely a back-up one. The Military-Revolutionary Committee used the Guards to protect bridges across the Neva. Red Guards from the Baltic works and Pipe works helped in the seizure of the Central Telegraph Office at 4pm on 24 October. Guards from the Vasilevskii

7. Startsev, op. cit., pp. 164, 195; Collins, D., 'A note on the numerical strength of the Russian Red Guards in October 1917', Soviet Studies, vol. 24, no. 2, October 1972, pp. 271-5.
8. Rakitov, 'O krasnoi gvardii', Krasnaya Letopis', 1923, no. 6.
9. Pinezhskii, E., Krasnaya Gvardiya, 2nd edn., M., 1933, pp. 42-3; Malakhovskii, V., Iz istorii Krasnoi Gvardii, L., 1925, p.12.
10. Oktyabr'skoe voornzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, pp. 236-8.

and Vyborg districts assisted sailors and soldiers from the Keksgolmskii regiment to take over the Central Post Office later that night. Meanwhile soldiers from the Moscow regiment, together with Red Guards from Vyborg, occupied the Finland Station. Putilov Red Guards helped the Izmailovskii regiment to seize the Baltic Station.¹¹ On 25 October Red Guards from the Moscow, Narva and Peterhof districts helped disarm the first and fourth regiments of Don Cossacks.¹² Startsev estimates that some 3,700 Red Guards were involved in suppressing the rebellions of officer cadets at the Vladimirskii, Pavlovskii, Mikhailovskii and Konstantinovskii training schools.¹³ The centrepiece of the seizure of power was, of course, the storming of the Winter Palace on the evening of 25 October. Startsev estimates that about 13% of the capital's Red Guards took part in this operation, mainly from the Petrograd, Vyborg and Vasilevskii districts of the capital.

Compared to the February Revolution or July Days - which were genuine mass insurrections in which the people took to the streets - the October Revolution was more of a military operation, directed by the Bolshevik party. The masses were barely involved, except vicariously through the Red Guards. The CCFC and the EC of the Petrograd Soviet called on workers to stay calm and remain at their work-benches. The factory committees were active in acquiring and distributing weapons, in requisitioning transport to put at the

11. Stepanov, op. cit., pp. 264-5; Rabinowitch, A., The Bolsheviks come to Power, N.Y., Norton, 1976, ch. 15.

12. ibid., p.268.

13. Startsev, op. cit., p.275.

disposal of the Military-Revolutionary Committee, in issuing revolutionary summonses, in guarding the factories and in organising meetings to explain what was happening.¹⁴ Factory committee and trade union representatives were on the Military-Revolutionary Committee, but the unions were less mobilised than the factory committees. Revolutionary printers formed one of the first Red Guards which, along with that of the woodturners' union, participated in the seizure of power. The metalworkers' union put 50,000r. at the disposal of the new government, and the food and transport unions endeavoured to keep the city operating.¹⁵ All in all, the unions, and even the factory committees, were relatively uninvolved in sweeping away the Kerensky government. Both organisations, however, were to play a crucial role in establishing the legitimacy of the government which replaced it.

There is no doubt that the vast majority of workers in Petrograd welcomed the demise of the mighty Kerensky. They regarded the overturn, not as a transfer of power to the Bolsheviks, but as a transfer of power to the soviets. In the first few days after 25 October enthusiastic resolutions, offering unconditional support to the new government, were passed by workers at Rozenkrantz, Obukhov, Sestroretsk, the Leman letter-foundry, the Petrograd tram park and by the foodworkers' union, by catering workers, by textileworkers at the Vyborg cotton-weaving, Leont'ev cotton-printing, Schlüsselburg cotton-printing and Nevka mills, by the Nevskaya footwear factory, by women printers and the by the conference of women workers on

14. Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy i profsoyuzy v revolyutsii 1917g., M.L., 1927, p.85.

15. ibid., p.86.

5 November.¹⁶ Particularly noteworthy is the elation of women workers at the demise of the 'government of swindlers', as one resolution put it. A large number of resolutions, however, whilst expressing support for the transfer of power, also demanded the formation of a government comprising all the socialist parties. For a brief period it was more or less official Bolshevik policy to aim for a socialist coalition government, so there was nothing particularly heterodox about this demand. In the week after 25 October, the CCFC, the PCTU and the EC of the Petrograd Soviet all expressed support for the idea of a government of all the left parties. This makes nonsense of the claim by some Soviet historians that only a Menshevik-inspired clique within the trade unions supported the coalition proposal. It is true that the demand for a coalition was sometimes a thinly-disguised attack on the Bolsheviks: the main supporter of the demand and sponsor of the coalition talks, Vikzhel - the executive of the railwayworkers' union - made no bones about its hostility to the Bolsheviks. In many other instances, however, the demand for a socialist coalition expressed a deep commitment to the idea of soviet democracy. At the Putilov works, workers in the gun shop, shipyard, turret shop, machine shop, engine-assembly shop, tank shop and company stores all passed resolutions calling for the formation of a government of all parties represented in the soviet.¹⁷ But whereas the gun

16. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie, pp. 559, 564, 568-9, 579, 585-6. Popov, A.L., ed., Oktyabr'skii perevorot, fakty i dokumenty, Pg., 1918, pp. 312-3.

17. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, p.154.

shop resolution was a clear statement of no confidence in the Bolshevik party, the shipyard resolution supported a coalition only on a revolutionary political basis.¹⁸ Other factories which appealed for a coalition government were the Cartridge, Arsenal, Ekval', Atlas, Reikel, Anchar and Odner works and also dockers at the Port.¹⁹ The major unions, including the metalworkers', textileworkers' and leatherworkers', also backed this call, following the lead of the PCTU on 31 October.²⁰ Although the CCFC committed itself briefly to support for a coalition, only the Nevskii district committee of factory committees is on record as having supported its lead. Very quickly it became clear that the Vikzhel-sponsored talks were getting nowhere, mainly because of the intransigence of the moderate socialists, though also because the group of Bolsheviks closest to Lenin were none too keen on them.²¹ Once it became apparent that there was no basis of political agreement between the Bolsheviks and the right-wing socialists, the consensus of opinion in the working class seems to have swung in favour of a government consisting mainly of Bolsheviks.

Outright opposition to the soviet regime on the part of the workers was astonishingly weak during the first three months of its existence. Only a handful of resolutions attacked the Bolshevik seizure of power, mainly from odd shops still dominated by Mensheviks or SR's in the Cartridge, Baltic, Siemens-Schuckert, Obukhov, Arsenal and Gun Works and from the municipal power station.²² The

18. Bor'ba Klassov, 1924, 1-2, pp. 291-3; Popov, op. cit., pp. 309-10.

19. Popov, op. cit., pp. 392-7.

20. Volin, S., Deyatel'nost' men'shevikov v profsoyuzakh pri Sovetskoi vlasti, Columbia, 1962, pp. 30-1.

21. Liebman, M., Leninism under Lenin, London: Cape, 1975, part 3, ch. 1. Daniels, Red October, London: Secker and Warburg, 1967, ch. 10.

22. Popov, op. cit., pp. 316-7.

Pal' factory was about the only textile mill to express opposition to the Bolshevik coup.²³ The total number of workers who supported opposition resolutions, however, cannot have exceeded more than a few thousand. Within the trade-union movement in Petrograd opposition to the seizure of power was based on the unions of white-collar workers. The only union of sluzhashchie to support the Bolsheviks was the union of commercial and industrial employers, most of whose members were shop workers. The printers were the major union of manual workers to outrightly oppose the seizure of power, though individual print works supported it. Although Vikzhel was hostile to the Bolshevik government, railway workers in Petrograd tended not to be, and resolutions expressing support for a soviet government were passed by the Nikolaev, Baltic and Moscow-Vindavo-Rybinsk railway depots in the capital, as well as by the Central Workshops of the North-Western Railway.²⁴ The paperworkers' union manifested dissatisfaction at the seizure of power, but it was firm in its condemnation of any attempt to return to a coalition with bourgeois parties.²⁵ The glass workers' union and chemical workers' union also condemned "the pernicious policy of isolating the working class" and called for a "homogeneous government on a broad democratic foundation...to lead the country to the Constituent Assembly and to give the people peace and land".²⁶

23. Edinstvo, 176, 1 November 1917, p.4.

24. Popov, op. cit., pp. 314-5.

25. Novaya Zhizn', 173, 5 November 1917, p.3; Rabochaya Gazeta, 206, 7 November 1917, p.4.

26. Shatilova, T., Ocherk istorii leningradskogo soyuza khimikov, 1905-18gg., L., 1927, p.64.

B. THE DECREE ON WORKERS' CONTROL

No sooner had the Winter Palace been stormed, than Lenin began work on the founding decrees of the world's first proletarian state - decrees on peace, land and workers' control. The Decree on Workers' Control was drafted on 26 October and put for discussion to the CCFC - which, since the first national conference on 17-22 October, had become the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees (ARCFC). The ARCFC itself drafted a decree, as did Larin and Milyutin jointly, but Lenin's draft was accepted as the basis for the Decree on Workers' Control. Lenin's decree breathes a spirit of libertarianism which reflects his profound faith at this time in the creativity of the masses. Lenin envisaged workers' control in all industrial enterprises, whatever their size, and his draft made all decisions of control organs binding on the employers. All the details of implementing workers' control were to be worked out by local soviets, factory committee conferences and committees of white-collar employees in situ.²⁷ This document is noteworthy for its lack of emphasis on state regulation of the economy, and represents the limit to which Lenin went in supporting the kind of decentralised workers' control practised by the factory committees. It cannot, however, be seen simply as a demagogic attempt to win political support from the CCFC leaders by making concessions to "syndicalism". Lenin firmly comes down on the side of the CCFC against the attempts by Milyutin and Larin to prohibit the control

27. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 35, M., 1962, pp. 30-1.

organs from imposing their decisions on the employers, but he sides with the latter, in agreeing that trade unions should have the power to override decisions by individual control organs when necessary.

A conference was held on 5 November, chaired by Shlyapnikov, which decided to accept the Lenin draft as the basis of the decree, but to amend it in accordance with proposals from both the factory committees and trade unions.²⁸ The Central Executive Committee (CEC) of the Soviets set up a five-man commission, including Milyutin, Lozovskii and the Left SR's Kamkov and Zaks, on 8 November, to work out the details of the draft.²⁹ On 14 November Milyutin introduced the Decree to the CEC for discussion and amendment. Speaking in an official rather than personal capacity, Milyutin explained that three objections had been made to the draft Decree in the course of drawing it up (Milyutin himself having been one of its most vocal critics). Firstly, critics had objected that workers' control could only be discussed in the context of a planned economy, but, Milyutin countered, "we have been overtaken by events ...we have had to coordinate the [work of] control [organs] set up in the localities and to draw them into a single, streamlined state apparatus, even at the cost of proceeding in an unsystematic fashion". Secondly, critics had objected that "the commission was extending powers of control too far [downwards] and that these

28. Keep, J.H.L., The Debate on Soviet Power: minutes of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.318.

29. ibid., p.106.

powers should be limited". Milyutin countered: "we proceeded from the principle of control from below. We based the control apparatus on the local factory committees, so that the higher instances of control will consist of their central bodies, filled out by representatives of trade unions and soviets". The third point which raised objection was whether employers should be bound by the decisions of the control organs. Critics felt that to make decisions mandatory would endanger the interests of the general economic plan; but the commission, whilst agreeing that employers should have three days in which to object to decisions, felt that not to make factory committee decisions binding, would create an unworkable system of workers' control.³⁰ The CEC ratified the Decree, which set up a structure of control organs at all levels, from the individual factory up to an All-Russian Council of Workers' Control, in order to promote "planned regulation of the national economy".³¹

On 16 November the Fifth Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees opened. The Decree was introduced for discussion and ratification by Skrypnik on behalf of the CCFC. It was opposed by Kotlov, the chairman of the technical commission of the Ministry of Labour, who felt that the Decree unduly restricted workers' self-activity, and that regulation of the economy was impossible without active workers' control. Taking their cue from him, the anarcho-syndicalists argued for factories to be transferred into the hands

30. ibid., pp. 124-5.

31. Akhapiin, Yu., ed., First Decrees of Soviet Power, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970, pp. 36-8.

the workers. Zhuk demanded the expropriation of factories facing closure and Bill Shatov preached the virtues of factory committees against the trade unions. Bolshevik orators from the CCFC called for active, wide-ranging control in the localities, but emphasised that this was but one part of regulating production, directed mainly against sabotage by factory owners. Skrypnik put the Decree to the vote and it was passed overwhelmingly, with only one vote against and twenty abstentions.³²

The importance of the Decree was more symbolic than real. As it existed on paper, it was unworkable, for it envisaged a hierarchy of control organs at enterprise, district, city and national level, which would have proved too cumbersome. Further problems arose from the fact that the Decree did not spell out in concrete detail how workers' control was to be implemented. A number of local soviets, trade unions and provincial conferences of factory committees worked out sets of instructions on the execution of the Decree and the scope of workers' control, by far the most important of which were the instructions issued by the Central Council of Factory Committees in Petrograd and those issued by the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control. It is worth examining these instructions in detail, since they reveal clearly what was at issue in the debate around factory committees and workers' control which was soon to erupt.

The Instructions of the CCFC, first published in Izvestiya on 7 December, are remarkable for the radicalism with which they

32. Novyi Put', 3-4, 1 December 1917, pp. 25-6. The conference was attended by 96 Bolsheviks, 24 SR's, 13 anarchists, 7 Mensheviks, 6 miscellaneous and 21 whose affiliation was unknown. Kanev, S.N., Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya i krakh anarkhizma, M., 1974, p.165.

approach the question of workers' control. They represent a bold advance on the positions taken by factory committee conferences up to October, no longer seeing control as "inspection" but as active intervention in production:

Workers' control of industry, as an integral part of control over the whole of economic life, must be understood not in the narrow sense of simple inspection (revizii), but, on the contrary, in the broad sense of intervening in the employer's disposal of capital, stocks, raw materials and finished goods in the factory; in the sense of actively supervising the proper and expedient fulfilment of orders and utilisation of energy and labour power; in the sense of participating in the organisation of production on rational lines, etc. Control will only achieve its end and justify the hopes pinned on it, if it is firstly, implemented by workers' organisations at both central and local level in the most energetic and vigorous manner, not stopping short of active measures to restrain employers who are clearly approaching the fulfilment of their duties in a negligent or harmful fashion; and secondly, if it is closely coordinated with and firmly tied to the general regulation and organisation of production, both in the individual enterprise and in the branch of industry as a whole. Control must be seen precisely as a transitional stage towards organising the whole economic life of the country on social lines, as the first step in this direction taken from below, parallel with work at the top in the central organs of the economy.³³

The Instructions then proceed to specify the tasks of workers' control in a very broad fashion. They envisage active interference in management, without clarifying precisely what powers and responsibilities management still has. The decisions of the control organs are made binding on management. The factory committees, organised into a

33. Narodnoe Khozyaistvo, 1, March 1918, p.28.

national hierarchy, are vested with sole responsibility for workers' control; trade union activity is confined to the area of wages. Didier-L. Limon argues that these Instructions, in effect, are about workers' self-management rather than workers' control.³⁴ This is undoubtedly true, insofar as the Instructions were drawn up against a background assumption that there was to be a rapid transition to socialism, in which workers' control would be transmogrified into workers' self-management. Yet these Instructions in no sense represent a syndicalist effort to decentralise the running of the economy. At the Sixth Conference of Factory Committees, from 22-27 January 1918, the anarchist, Bleikhman, criticised the CCFC Instructions for their 'centralism', though he conceded that this was a 'democratic' type of centralism.³⁵ Control was envisaged as taking place at both state level and factory level and local initiatives were to be organised into a hierarchy of local and regional Councils of National Economy (sovnarkhazy), topped by the Supreme Council of National Economy (V.S.N.Kh.). This was not an anarcho-syndicalist schema but a plan for the democratic socialisation of production, which had the support of perhaps a majority of Bolsheviks at this stage, including, for a short period, Lenin himself. It is for this reason that the Secretariat of the Bolshevik Central Committee sent these Instructions, rather than those of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control, to provincial

34. Limon, D-L., 'Lénine et le contrôle ouvrier', Autogestion, no. 4, Déc. 1967, Paris, pp. 83-5.

35. Novaya Zhizn', 19, 26 January 1918, p.3.

bodies who requested information on how to implement the Decree on Workers' Control.³⁶

The All-Russian Council of Workers' Control (ARCWC) was brought into being by the Decree on Workers' Control of November 14, but it was virtually stillborn. It met but twice before it was absorbed into V.S.N.Kh. (established December 1).³⁷ The ARCWC consisted of only five representatives from the factory committees, out of more than forty members. The rest comprised representatives from the soviets, the PCTU, the cooperatives etc., including some Mensheviks and SR's. It was chaired by the Bolshevik leader of the metalworkers' union, V.V. Schmidt. The Council's one act of significance was to produce an alternative set of Instructions on workers' control, more moderate than those of the CCFC. The ARCWC Instructions emphasised the necessity of a centralised system of control in which individual factory control commissions would be subordinated to the control-distribution commission of the trade union of the particular branch of industry. This has led some Soviet historians to argue that these Instructions were an attempt by Menshevik trade union leaders to subordinate the control organs to the trade unions rather than to the state. That they represent an attempt to assert trade union suzerainty over the factory committees is beyond dispute, but this was an aspiration shared as much by Bolshevik trade-union leaders as by Menshevik. The Instructions cannot be interpreted as an effort to displace state organs from the sphere of workers' control, since they affirmed that trade union control commissions should be subject to regional councils of workers' control, which in turn should be

36. Lenin, op. cit., p.448.

37. Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, pp. 79-80.

subject to V.S.N.Kh. The second significant feature of the ARCWC Instructions is that they laid down that management functions should remain in the hands of the employer:

Administrative (rasporyaditel'nye) rights to manage the enterprise and its operations and activities remain with the owner. The control commission does not take part in the management of the enterprise and does not bear any responsibility for its operations and activity.³⁸

This was merely a restatement of the position of successive factory committee conferences prior to the October Revolution. It offered no solution to the problem outlined in chapter 8 of how factory committees could avoid responsibility for the enterprise if they had more de facto power than the official administration in the areas of supplies, output, equipment, labour discipline, purchasing, demobilisation, etc.

C. THE DEBATE ABOUT THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF WORKERS' CONTROL

The two sets of Instructions about the implementation of the Decree on Workers' Control were at the centre of the debate between the factory committees and trade union leaders in December 1917 and January 1918. The Instructions of the Central Council of Factory Committees were seen by both trade union leaders and factory committee militants as giving carte blanche to individual factory committees to implement the most far-reaching schemes of grass roots 'control'. It was at these Instructions, therefore, that much of the fire of the trade-union opposition was directed. The most devastating

38. Narodnoe Khozyaistvo, 1, 1918, p.28.

critique of the Instructions was undoubtedly that mounted by the Bolshevik trade union leader, A. Lozovskii, in his pamphlet, Rabochii Kontrol', (Workers' Control), published on 8 January 1918.³⁹

According to Lozovskii, "the basic defect of the projected law is that it makes no connection with the planned regulation of the economy and disperses control of production, instead of centralising it".⁴⁰ Lozovskii and the other trade union leaders believed that:

the lower control organ must act within limits which are strictly defined by the higher organs of control and regulation, whereas the comrades who stand for decentralisation and workers' control uphold the independence and autonomy of the lower control organs, suggesting that the masses themselves will imbue the proclaimed principle of workers' control with concrete content.⁴¹

Lozovskii argued that the Instructions of the Central Council of Factory Committees were completely illogical, for whilst they talked of the employer and of profit, they effectively abolished the old management by totally subordinating it to the factory control organ. In reality the Instructions did not aspire to workers' control at all, but to the complete reorganisation of the economy along socialist lines and to workers' self-management: "The notion of workers' control thus no longer represents a transitional measure but rather the immediate realisation of a new mode of production".⁴²

39. A. Lozovskii (S.A. Dridzo) was elected to the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions at the Third Trade Union Conference in June. In July he joined the Bolshevik party but was expelled in December for his views on trade union independence. He rejoined the party in 1919 and served it faithfully until his death in 1952.

40. Lozovskii, A., Rabochii Kontrol', Pg., 1918, p.21.

41. ibid., p.20.

42. ibid., p.23.

There is much truth in Lozovskii's strictures. The Bolshevik seizure of power, together with ever-deeper economic chaos, had caused the leaders of the Central Council of Factory Committees to develop a more ambitious concept of workers' control than they had entertained prior to October. The Bolshevik, Kaktyn', explained in the CCFC journal, Novyi Put', how the nature of workers' control was changing, now that socialism was on the agenda: no longer was it merely a question of controlling the activities of capital in order to maintain production - workers' self-management was now a possibility.

You know that what is now taking place is not a quiet, peaceful process of social development with powerful conservatism in the sphere of ideas; on the contrary, we are living through the greatest socialist revolution, not only in the political, but still more fundamentally, in the economic sphere. We are experiencing the complete and total collapse and destruction of capitalist ideology in the consciousness of the broad popular masses and of basic age-old institutions, such as private property, competition, freedom for individualist plunder etc. A most cruel war, waged for nearly four years by the imperialists of the different alliances seeking dominion for their capital throughout the world, has unavoidably brought the toilers of all countries firstly, to an ideological revolution - to the over-throw of the prejudices of bourgeois society ingrained by the centuries - and then to a social revolution, which has begun in Russia, the country most exhausted by the war, and which is rolling in a mighty wave through all countries of the world, breaking out in mass uprisings, first here, then there.⁴³

43. Novyi Put', 1-2, 14 January 1918, p.4.

For Kaktyn', as for the other CCFC leaders, the actuality of permanent revolution completely transformed the nature of workers' control, as he went on to explain in the same article:

The very notion of control, at first completely unclear, has gradually, with the further development of the revolution and the aggravation of economic disorder, become more concrete and more widely and deeply developed...It is clear that in our situation there can no longer be any talk of the old method of passive control of production and distribution so cherished by our spineless intelligentsia. Even if individual comrades in the Bolshevik party, along with Novaya Zhizn', defend the idea and try to extend it through the higher economic organs and cast it in a form which totally distorts the original Decree on Workers' Control, and even if all those seize on it who fear the dictatorship of the proletariat and socialism more than death (the trade union elite, the union of engineers and technicians and others, not to mention the employers), then it only serves to emphasise their feebleness.⁴⁴

The confusion implicit in this radical concept of 'control' was neatly encapsulated in the opening speech made by the Bolshevik Zhivotov to the Sixth Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees on January 22, 1918. He proclaimed:

We must no longer talk of control of production, but of the revolutionary seizure of the whole economic life of the country, for only then will sabotage and other kinds of bourgeois resistance no longer hinder the workers from achieving control and implementing the demobilisation, regulation and financing of industry.

44. ibid.

He went on to call for the creation of district sovnarkhozy (councils of national economy) which "must be that socialist organisation which will manage the economy".⁴⁵ In the one breath Zhivotov reiterates the old idea of control against capitalist sabotage and then elides it into socialist organisation of the economy.

Lozovskii correctly linked the debate on workers' control to the fundamental question of the Russian Revolution: was socialism on the immediate agenda? -

It is absolutely essential to counterpose the organisation or production to the regulation of production. For in these two terms are encapsulated two systems and two views on the next tasks of the proletariat in the Russian Revolution. If one thinks that Russia can pass to the immediate realisation of a socialist system, if one thinks that socialism in Russia is a practical task of the day, then one must speak of the organisation of production, and not only speak of it, but execute it in practice. One must socialise all enterprises and hand the whole apparatus into the hands of the workers. But those who think we can organise production do not at present go so far in the logical development of their principles.⁴⁶

Lozovskii himself took up what was in essence a Menshevik-Internationalist, rather than a Bolshevik, position:

There can be no doubt that the immediate socialisation of the means of production and exchange is not on the agenda of the Russian Revolution. We are faced, and not only we but the whole of Western Europe, with living through a rather lengthy transitional period of state capitalism or state socialism, under which the working class will act against the state-employer in selling its labour power...Workers' control is a transitional revolutionary measure...(it) does not

45. Novyi Put', 4-5, 25 February 1918, p.11.

46. Lozovskii, op. cit., p.24.

affect the foundations of the capitalist system. It leaves intact the private property in the means of production and the whole private trading apparatus - not because this is better from the point of view of proletarian interests, but because at the present historical moment the proletariat does not have the power to do more, given its lack of organisational experience and in the absence of a socialist revolution in the economically-advanced countries of Western Europe. The proletariat can lay hands on the whole productive apparatus, can move close to the whole process of production, can take an active part in carrying out the state-wide plan of regulation, can reduce the appetites of the ruling classes with a rough hand and force them to submit to its control - but more than this it cannot do.⁴⁷

The majority of Bolsheviks were not impressed by the cogency of Lozovskii's economic views, merely shocked at what seemed to be his political pusillanimity. To men like Kaktyn' or Skrypnik, the prospect of resigning themselves to a whole historic epoch of state capitalism was anathema. Nor were they prepared to sit back and await a revolution in Western Europe. They were determined rather to push the revolution in Russia as far in a socialist direction as it would go, in the hope of stimulating international revolution. To such men nothing looked easier than the abolition of capitalism in a country in the throes of revolution, war and economic crisis. Capitalism was tearing itself apart and it was the duty of revolutionaries to ensure that socialism was established in its place. Any talk of state capitalism could only come from those who had sold their souls to capital and could serve only to promote capitalist restoration.

47. ibid., pp. 24-5.

It should not be assumed that the views of Lozovskii were shared by only a handful of incipient trade union bureaucrats, nor that Skrypnik and others necessarily represented the views of the majority of the working class, though in the Petrograd metal industry they enjoyed widespread support. Not all sections of workers were as enthusiastic about the radical style of 'control - with its concomitant responsibilities - as were metalworkers. The union of textileworkers of the Central Industrial Region, the union of needleworkers, the economic department of the Moscow Soviet and other bodies all produced instructions on the implementation of workers' control which followed the moderate line of The All-Russian Council of Workers' Control.

D. THE DEBATE ABOUT FUSION OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES AND THE TRADE UNIONS

On 29 December a conference took place of representatives from factory committees and trade unions in the Petrograd metal industry. This conference was addressed, on behalf of the metalworkers' union, by the Bolshevik G. Weinberg, who described the dismal state of production and the massive problems of demobilising the war industries. He then went on to attack the factory committees for their parochialism and to call for a centralised system of workers' control. He argued that it was the trade unions - organisations which embraced whole industries, in contrast to the localised factory committees - which had now to tackle the problems of the economy. The factory committee representatives, led by the anarchist Voronkov, sharply rebutted Weinberg's arguments, calling for more active

control and affirming their support for the CCFC Instructions.⁴⁸

The Bolshevik Commissar of Labour, Alexander Shlyapnikov, repeated the charge of parochialism, accusing the factory committees of collaborating with, or allowing themselves to be used by, employers as a lever with which to squeeze financial aid from the state.⁴⁹

The conclusion spelt out by both Weinberg and Shlyapnikov was that it was time for the factory committees to be absorbed into the trade union apparatus by becoming the primary cells of the unions in the enterprise.

The charge of parochialism was a stick with which the trade unions had frequently belaboured the factory committees.⁵⁰ The syndicalist leader of the metalworkers' union, A. Gastev, had the following to say at the All-Russian Tariff Conference of the Metalworkers' Union on 15 October:

The 'controlling' activities of the factory committees have given birth to many 'original illusions'. The committees are frequently buried in the narrow shell of local factory problems...Such a narrow 'local' politics goes hand in hand with a 'broad' understanding of immediate tasks.⁵¹

This, he argued, led to factory committees competing with one another for orders and government loans and to their working with management against other factories. He continued:

48. Narodnoe Slovo, 19, 22 December 1917, p.4; Metallist, 1, 11 January 1918, pp. 12-13.

49. Metallist, 1, 1918, p.14.

50. For a discussion of some instances of factory committee parochialism see the next chapter.

51. Vserossiiskaya tariffnaya konferentsiya soyuzov metallistov, Pg., 1918, p.5.

In general one must say that it's completely inadequate to control a single industrial enterprise; one must also control the highest organs of finance and management. One must remember that large-scale speculation and the major levers of production are found outside the factory; and under the present system of 'control', the factory committees sanction speculative operations suggested by financial dealers who are unknown to them.⁵²

In an article in Metallist, Ya. Boyarkov, a Bolshevik from the Khar'kov metal union, fulminated against workers' control in one of the most rancorous polemics directed at the factory committees by the unions, and one which became a favourite target of critics on the Left. In this article Boyarkov argued:

The only real method of struggle against the sabotage of industrialists is state regulation of production...The whole sense of 'workers' control' arose from the fact that there was no higher authority which would put a stop to the criminal disruption of the economy and, willy-nilly, we were forced by our own efforts to achieve control over the actions of the industrialists within the confines of the individual enterprise... 'Workers' control' by itself is an anarchist attempt to establish socialism in one enterprise and leads in practice to clashes between groups of workers... Of course, the state can and must be based on the proletarian organisations - in the first place, on the trade unions, which alone can assist the process of restoring industrial life'.⁵³

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Central Committee of the Metal Union, which condemned the seizure of factories:

since this leads to the worst kind of class collaboration and to workers becoming captives

52. ibid., p.7.

53. Metallist, 6, 30 November 1917, pp. 3-6.

of the employers, who exploit them in order to solicit loans and subsidies...The Central Committee summons workers to stick to the tried and tested method of struggle through the unions. In addition, the Central Committee proposes to get the state to regulate industry on a broad basis, with the participation of the labour movement in the organs of regulation.⁵⁴

The factory committee leaders themselves admitted that there was some truth to the charges of parochialism (see next chapter for some examples). As early as August at the Second Conference of Factory Committees, Skrypnik condemned the "patriotism of one's parish" (kolokol'ni, lit. bell-tower). Replying to the charges of parochialism the journal of the CCFC, Novyi Put' argued:

Some people point to the narrowness and restrictiveness of individual factory committees, to their local or factory approach to solving problems - particularly in the provinces. But such deviations are the inevitable consequence of the narrow limits within which the capitalist class and its government seek to confine these revolutionary economic organisations. The path of the working class does not lie in every workers' cell pottering around in its own little corner, nor in solving the whole social question by seizing individual factories for communist experiments. It lies rather in the class struggle of the proletariat at the head of the broad masses of poor peasants, the class struggle of every labour organisation - the trade union, the factory committee and the soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies - against the counter-revolutionary activity of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁵

Contrary to the expectations of Novyi Put', the removal of the "narrow limits" on workers' control by the Bolshevik decree seems to

54. Metallist, 1, 1918, p.11.

55. Novyi Put', 1-2, 15 October 1917, p.3.

have aggravated rather than attenuated tendencies towards factory committee parochialism, and this was, without doubt, a major factor in persuading Lenin and others that the committees must be subordinated to the trade unions.

The other charge made against the factory committees to justify their absorption into the trade unions was that they merely duplicated the activity of the trade unions. Writing in the journal of the Petrograd metalworkers' union, G. Weinberg explained how:

The Petrograd union of metalworkers, as soon as it took steps in this direction (i.e. of regulating the industry - SAS), unfortunately clashed with another organisation - the Central Council of Factory Committees. Questionnaires on the state of the metal industry, sent out by the union to each factory, were matched by questionnaires sent by the CCFC. Two labour organisations were doing the very same work, completely separately, wasting limited energies and expending double the resources.⁵⁶

Weinberg, unlike Lozovskii, saw the task as being that of "socialist construction and restructuring of production", but he believed that only the trade unions were capable of doing this.

E. THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS IN THE PERIOD AFTER OCTOBER

The debates about workers' control and the relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions were linked to a third debate about the role of the trade unions under a workers' and peasants' government. The Third Conference of Trade Unions in June had specified that the main function of the trade unions was to conduct the economic struggle in defence of workers' living standards; it had rejected the

56. Metallist, 2, 19 February 1918, pp. 3-4.

idea of unions intervening in the sphere of production. Some unions, however, most notably the Petrograd metalworkers' union, had begun to argue, as early as the summer, that a new task now faced the trade union movement, viz. participation in the regulation of the economy. After the Kerensky government was ousted from office in October, more and more voices were heard arguing for a redefinition of the role of the unions. G. Weinberg wrote in Metallist in December that the major task of the unions was no longer the defence of workers' economic interests, since the workers' government could do this far more adequately, but "participation in the organs regulating and controlling production and the economy".⁵⁷ The leatherworkers' journal observed that "facing the unions in all its fullness is the problem of organisation and control of production".⁵⁸ This attempt to redefine the tasks of the unions threw into relief a much broader problem about the relationship of the unions to the workers' and peasants' state. If the unions were no longer to fulfil their traditional function of defending workers' economic interests, the state now doing this instead, and if they were to become organs of economic regulation under the direction of the state, could the unions be said to have any functions separate from those of the state? Should they not logically end their separate organisational existence and merge themselves into the state apparatus? This was the question which was to dominate the proceedings of the first national congress of trade unions which took place from 7-14 January 1918.

57. Metallist, 1, 1918, p.2.

58. Golos Kozhevnik, 4-5, 1 December 1918, p.2.

About 500 delegates attended the first national congress, of whom 428 had voting rights. Nineteen national unions were represented with a total membership of 2.5 million, including 600,000 from the metal union, 500,000 from the textile union, 200,000 from the leather union.⁵⁹ Of the voting delegates 281 were Bolsheviks, 67 Mensheviks, 21 Left SR's, 10 Right SR's, 6 SR Maximalists, 6 anarcho-syndicalists and 37 belonged to no political party.⁶⁰ Interestingly, the right-wing minority consisted of proportionately more national executive members than rank-and-file delegates. 43% of national executive members were Mensheviks and Right SR's, compared to 13% of local delegates. Only 37% of national executive members were Bolsheviks, Left SR's, SR Maximalists or anarcho-syndicalists, compared to 79% of local delegates.⁶¹

The debate about the role of the unions and their relationship to the state took place in a highly charged political atmosphere. Zinoviev argued on behalf of the Bolsheviks that:

The political victory of workers and poor peasants over the imperialists and their petit-bourgeois agents in Russia is bringing us to the threshold of international socialist revolution and to victory over the capitalist mode of production. The Soviets of workers', soldiers' and peasants' deputies have become the organs of government and the policy of the workers' and peasants' government is a policy of socialist reconstruction of society.⁶²

59. Pervyi vserossiiskii s"ezd professional'nykh soyuzov 7-14 yanvarya 1918g., M., 1918, p.338; Garvi, P.A., Professional'nye soyuzy v Rossii v pervye gody revolyutsii, 1917-21, New York, 1958, p.32.

60. Volin, op. cit., p.35; Pervyi s"ezd, p.338 gives slightly different figures.

61. Novyi Put', 3, 21 January 1918, p.8.

62. Pervyi S"ezd, p.69; Resolyutsiya vserossiiskikh konferentsii i s"ezdov professional'nykh soyuzov, Pg., 1919, p.91 (henceforward Resolyutsiya prof. soyuzov).

He inveighed against the notion that "there can be neutrality in the great historic contest between revolutionary socialism and its opponents". He argued that "the centre of gravity of trade union must now shift to the organisational-economic sphere. The unions, as class organisations of the proletariat...must take on the major work of organising production and reviving the disrupted productive forces of the country".⁶³ In the first draft of his resolution, Zinoviev did not hesitate to draw the conclusion that the congress should "proclaim the trade unions state organisations", but the Moscow party organisation objected to this.⁶⁴ The final resolution stated that "the trade unions will inevitably become transformed into organs of the socialist state, membership of which will be a civic duty for all those employed in a particular branch of industry".⁶⁵ This compromise formula merely said that 'statisation' of the unions would not come about at once; it was not a recognition of qualified trade-union independence. The right to strike, for example, was explicitly rejected by Zinoviev ("the strike would be directed against the workers themselves") and the Bolshevik resolution on workers' control in its final version deleted a clause recognising the right to strike.

Martov led the Menshevik opposition to Zinoviev, which, in spite of profound internal scissions, operated on a common platform of "unity and independence of the trade-union movement".⁶⁶ Martov began by reminding the congress that in 1906 Lenin had stated that it was impossible to jump from autocracy to socialism, since the

63. ibid.

64. Vestnik Truda, 1921, 3, p.11.

65. Resolyutsiya prof. soyuzov, p.92.

66. Garvi, op. cit., pp. 32-4.

preconditions for socialism were lacking. The proletariat was neither sufficiently homogeneous to see in socialism the sole solution to its problems, nor sufficiently experienced to manage the economy. Concentration of production had not yet reached a level where it governed the dynamic of the whole economy since small-scale production was still preponderant. The present revolution was thus still objectively a bourgeois one. Replying to Zinoviev, Martov cried: "To say that the very fact of existence of soviets is proof of a new era in the life of mankind - the era of socialism - is vacuous rubbish". If the Bolsheviks continued their socialist experiments, he maintained, not only would they destroy the economy, they would disenchant the workers and pave the way for a capitalist restoration. So long as workers continued to sell their labour power, he concluded, free and independent unions were necessary to defend workers' interests. This did not mean, however, that unions should not take part in the business of economic regulation, in order to inject into it "realism, marxism and scientific socialism". Martov's resolution received 84 votes against the 182 cast for Zinoviev's.⁶⁷

This debate on the role of the trade unions adumbrated, in many respects, the later, more famous debate of 1920-21.⁶⁸ In the later debate Trotsky was in a minority in demanding the 'stat-isation' of the trade unions, but in January 1918, this was the official, albeit modified, position of the congress. Strangely, the Left SR's were the most intransigent advocates of "the creation of organs

67. Pervyi s"ezd, p.82; Professional'nyi Soyuz, 1, February 1918, pp. 11-13; Garvi, op. cit., p.37.

68. Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, London: Penguin, 1966 edn., pp. 220-9; Daniels, R., The Conscience of the Revolution, New York, Clarion, 1969, ch. 5.

of socialist government out of the trade unions" and voted against the Bolshevik resolution because, in its final form, it called for the gradual, rather than immediate, absorption of the unions by the state. More strangely still, Lozovskii was expelled from the party in January 1918 for advocating a position remarkably close to the compromise position of Lenin at the 10th Party Congress in 1921. Lozovskii argued that "the trade unions, whilst taking part in all the newly-created organisations...remain independent organisations of the working class...So long as capitalism exists, so long as private property in the means of production exists, so long as human exploitation exists, the unions must conduct the economic struggle as one of their tasks...The statisation of the unions is possible, finally, when we have arrived at a socialist system, when we have not a mixed but an authentic dictatorship of the working class, when socialisation of the whole economic apparatus has taken place".⁶⁹ All Lozovskii's amendments to the Bolshevik resolution, defending trade union autonomy, were rejected, since they were too close to the positions of the Mensheviks to be acceptable at this stage.

A majority of trade unions accepted the position adopted by the congress on the role of the trade unions and their relationship to the state. The first national congress of metalworkers, which began on 15 January 1918, endorsed the congress position.⁷⁰ The first national congress of needleworkers did likewise, by 34 votes to 10, with one abstention. The needleworkers also affirmed that "the

69. Pervyi s"ezd, pp. 229-35; Vestnik Truda, 1921, 3, p.12.

70. Metallist, 2, 1918, pp. 8-9.

strike has become unnecessary and harmful under a working-class government, when the defence of labour...can be achieved through the apparatus of the state". This resolution was passed by 29 votes to 6, but with a large number of abstentions.⁷¹ As it turned out, these resolutions meant very little. The trade unions continued to enjoy considerable independence from the government during the civil war, which explains why the debate of 1920-21 took place.

F. THE SUBJUGATION OF THE FACTORY COMMITTEES

The national congress of trade unions resolved the fate of the factory committees and of workers' control in three resolutions: on the regulation of industry, on workers' control of production and on the inter-relationship of the factory committees and trade unions.

The resolution on the regulation of industry, drafted by the Bolshevik, G. Tsyperovich, was moderate and typical of Second International marxism in its theoretical approach. It welcomed capitalist concentration of production as opening the gates to a socialist economy:

The revolution in Russia has raised the question of regulating industry and other branches of the economy, in political conditions in which the methods of regulation created by the capitalist class against the popular masses can and must be used in the interests of the masses, against the capitalist system as a whole.

The resolution went on:

The all-embracing process of syndication and trustification of different branches of industry, transport and finance, which is typical of the

71. Proletarii Igly, 1, 25 March 1918, pp. 4-5, 12-14.

most recent stage of capitalism, completely excludes the possibility of regulation simply within the individual enterprise. This process automatically links the largest enterprises in each branch of industry into one whole, and then amalgamates the syndicates in different branches of industry, unifying them on an international scale.

The resolution, in line with Bolshevik thinking at this time, did not envisage nationalisation, merely the establishment of strictly-centralised syndicates and trusts as the first step towards this. It envisaged workers' control as operating in this system since:

the absence of such control would lead to the creation of a new industrial bureaucracy which would be harmful and would ill-befit the new relations of production. Such control can only be influential if it is tightly coordinated by one major centre of regulation, if its cells are joined together and subordinated to one major centre of workers' control and if it is based on the trade unions, helped by other suitable forces.⁷²

It was Lozovskii, now outside the party, who introduced the Bolshevik resolution on workers' control, perhaps because it accorded with his own views. The resolution stated that the task of workers' control was to "end autocracy in the economic sphere, just as it has been ended in the political sphere". It specified the content of workers' control as involving stock-taking of fuel and raw materials, investigation of finances, the determination of output quotas and productivity, inspection of accounts and supervision of the general running of the factory. The resolution emphasised, however,

72. Resolyutsiya prof. soyuzov, pp. 118-9.

that such control was part of a general system of planned economic regulation and that "it is necessary to repudiate in the most unequivocal fashion all notions of dispersing workers' control, by giving workers in each enterprise the right to take final decisions on matters affecting the very existence of the enterprise". The resolution vested responsibility for control in the trade unions and exhorted them to preach the virtues of centralised control. It specified that factory control commissions should be subject to the control commissions of the unions and should include union representatives not working at the factory. In turn, the union control commissions should include factory committee representatives, as well as technicians, accountants and statisticians. The resolution, finally, endorsed the much-maligned Instructions on workers' control which had been worked out by the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control.⁷³

The Menshevik minority, led by F.A. Cherevanin, opposed these two resolutions. Theirs began from the twin assumption that "Russia must still pass through a rather prolonged stage of bourgeois development", and that, internationally, a system of state capitalism existed under which the proletariat should strive for maximum representation on the state organs of economic regulation. The Mensheviks called on "all conscious layers of the proletariat to fight attempts at proletarian dictatorship in the industrial sphere and quasi-socialist experiments doomed to inevitable failure". In his summing-up

73. Pervyi s"ezd, p.229.

Cherevanin provoked howls of protest. While condemning workers' control for exacerbating chaos in the economy, he called on Menshevik trade unionists to participate in the control organs in order to "fight against factory separatism and fight for the complete subordination of the control organs to the state organs of industrial regulation". He concluded:

So long as this disastrous and, from our point of view, suicidal process is going on, we will not stand on one side, we will not content ourselves with being spectators, observers, we will not say 'Go ahead, destroy yourselves!' (Noise, cries from the left of 'saboteur!'). We are not calling for sabotage, we remain in the ranks of the working class, we will not refuse to participate in the different labour organisations which are now being created, because we believe that the prospects facing Russia are too dire and gloomy.⁷⁴

A further resolution on regulation of the economy was introduced by Maksimov on behalf of the anarcho-syndicalists. This attacked both the state control lauded by the Mensheviks and workers' control as advocated by "the government which loudly proclaims itself a workers' and peasants' government". Maksimov argued that workers' control was now outmoded, since the task was no longer to limit disruption in the economy but to reorganise it. This could not be done by the "creation of state institutions in which the worker-bureaucrat (chinovnik-rabochii) is sovereign", but only by allowing free rein to the toiling people. He argued for socialisation of production and the federation of producers in both industry and agriculture: "the planned, successful radical transformation of

74. ibid., p.200; Resolyutsiya prof. soyuzov, pp. 125-7; Garvi, op. cit., p.41.

society is possibly only when production is taken over by free, autonomous, revolutionary proletarian organisations".⁷⁵

The debate on the future of the factory committees was introduced in brusque fashion by Ryazanov, the proposer of the Bolshevik resolution which called for the organisational subordination of the factory committees to the trade unions. Having accused the committees of parochialism, he called on them "to choose that form of suicide which would be most useful to the trade union movement as a whole".⁷⁶ i.e. to become the factory cells of the relevant industrial union. The anarcho-syndicalists were outraged. Bill Shatov denounced the trade unions as "living corpses" and Maksimov hailed the factory committees as "children of the revolution, the direct offspring of the workers themselves...manifesting all the intelligence, power and energy of the working class in the localities".⁷⁷ The anarcho-syndicalists were fighting a rearguard action: their resolution gained a mere six votes. For once the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks joined forces to vote for Ryazanov's resolution.

The position adopted by the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions was now official Bolshevik policy, but it took several more weeks for the CCFC to finally reconcile itself to fusion with the trade unions.⁷⁸ Although the Bolshevik factory committee leaders do not seem to have opposed fusion in principle, they were unhappy

75. Pervyi s"ezd, p.82.

76. ibid., p.235.

77. ibid., p.240.

78. Novyi Put', 1-2, 1918, p.2. The factory committee leaders had recently tried to argue that the regulation of the economy was the task of neither the unions nor the committees but of the sovnarkhozy (ibid.).

with the manner in which it was being brought about. On 21 January the CCFC pointed to the "discrepancy between the verbal revolutionism of the Congress and its actual conservatism". They criticised the trade unions for their "unrelenting tactic of subordinating the factory committees to themselves and absorbing all their functions, without looking into whether or not the immense and unorganised apparatus of the unions can execute even one of these functions". Instead of planning a smooth merger, the trade unions were content merely to attack the supposed parochialism of the factory committees:

One detects a complete unwillingness to deal with this new revolutionary organisation as a worthy collaborator in common work. Instead there is a stubborn striving to put them (the factory committees) at a lower level - to equate them with anarchic, unconscious, mass elementalism.⁷⁹

Although the CCFC appears to have been reluctant to liquidate itself - at least on trade union terms, at grass-roots level, the harsh facts of economic life were forcing factory committees and trade unions together. On Vasilevskii Island, for example, shortages of raw materials and fuels, unemployment and the threat of closures had forced the factory committees and trade unions as early as 9 December to form a joint district council which subsequently took the appellation of 'Economic Council of the Workers of Vasilevskii district'. It consisted of three sections: a department of labour, a department for procuring raw materials and fuel, and a department for demobilisation and control.⁸⁰ On 15 January the Vyborg district

79. Novyi Put', 3, 1918, pp. 1-2.

80. ibid., p.12.

council of factory committees called for immediate fusion of factory committees and trade unions into a single economic organisation.⁸¹

In the textile and leather industries cooperation between the two organisations was already advanced by the end of 1917. Only in the metal industry was conflict between trade unions and factory committees as to the terms of amalgamation acute. On 28 January the Central Board of the Metalworkers' Union agreed that the factory committees should become primary cells of the trade unions and that the trade unions should take over the task of organising production. As a sop to the factory committees, it agreed that the delegate councils of metalworkers at district and city level should be replaced by conferences of factory committees. This concession met with a lot of opposition from the city delegate council of the metalworkers' union on 1 February, when G. Weinberg put the resolution of the Central Board to them for ratification. It was eventually approved by 159:59 votes.⁸²

From 22-27 January the sixth and final conference of Petrograd factory committees took place. This called for widespread nationalisation - "the transfer of all means of production, factories and works into the hands of the state" - a call which was supported by all the delegates save six anarcho-syndicalists.⁸³ Significantly, the resolution demanded that factory committees be charged with responsibility for running these nationalised enterprises and was thus, in part, a disguised demand for workers' self-management. Conference passed a further resolution affirming the need for factory committees

81. Novyi Put', 3, 1918, p.12.

82. Metallist, 2, 1918, p.5; Metallist, 3, 23 March 1918, p.15.

83. Novyi Put', 4-5, 25 February 1918, p.13.

to merge with the trade unions and calling for the functions of the CCFC to pass to the corresponding organs of the industrial unions, but it would be wrong to interpret this as a gracious admission of defeat by the Committees. As Zhivotov proclaimed, "If they (i.e. the trade unions, SAS) want to refashion us, then they won't succeed. By going into the unions, we are going to refashion them".⁸⁴ As if to affirm this intention, the fusion resolution proposed that the factory committees elect the boards of the unions.⁸⁵ Moreover, the conference endorsed the CCFC Instructions on workers' control, in spite of the fact that the ARCWC Instructions had been ratified by the All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions. Thus although the Sixth Conference may have genuflected hastily to the idea of trade union supremacy, at root, the will of the factory committees to be independent remained unbowed.

On 1 April trade unions and factory committees in the metal industry finally fused. At the fusion conference Zhivotov, on behalf of the CCFC, explained that the CCFC had lost its *raison d'être* now that central and regional sovnarkhozy were in existence. With the exit from the CCFC of the metalworkers' delegates, who comprised two-thirds of the membership of that body, the CCFC ceased to exist and its remnants were absorbed into the sovnarkhoz of the Northern Industrial Region. Zhivotov emphasised the necessity of strong factory committees in each enterprise as the foundation stones of the union apparatus, but wisely avoided saying too much about the precise functions of the committees. Subsequent events were to prove that these were as much in dispute as ever.⁸⁶

84. Novaya Zhizn', 19, 26 January 1918, p.3.

85. Novyi Put', 4-5, 1918, p.13.

86. The syndicalist newspaper welcomed the fusion - a sure sign that it was not regarded as the end of the committees. Golos Truda, 5, 6 April 1918, p.4.

Did the six months after the October Revolution see a victory of the trade unions over the factory committees? Clearly, in one sense the trade unions were victorious, insofar as they succeeded in absorbing the factory committees into their apparatus. Conversely, the factory committees did not succeed, as the anarcho-syndicalists wished, in completely displacing the trade unions. At a deeper level, however, the "victory" of the trade unions over the factory committees was far more ambiguous. G. Binshtok, the Menshevik trade union leader, wrote in Professional'nyi Soyuz, the journal set up by the Mensheviks after the First Trade Union Congress, to defend the autonomy of the trade unions from the Bolshevik state:

With complete justice the trade unions can say to the factory committees: 'Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!' - because the trade unions, having taken on the organisation of production, have in fact been transformed into unified factory committees.⁸⁷

Binshtok is here pointing to the significant change which had taken place in the function of the trade unions after the October Revolution. Prior to October the factory committees and trade unions had worked out a modus vivendi, by clearly distinguishing between the function of controlling production, which was assigned to the factory committees, and that of defending the wages and conditions of workers, which was assigned to the trade unions. The transfer of power to a workers' government, however, and, more importantly, the destruction of the

87. The quotation is of the purported dying words of Emperor Julian the Apostate (Theodoret, Historia Ecclesiae, vol. III, 20) Professional'nyi Soyuz, 1, 1918.

economy, caused the trade unions to decisively shift the focus of their activities away from the wages front towards the production front. Increasingly, they came to see their job not as one of simply controlling production, but as one of full-scale regulation and organisation of production. In so acting, they were clearly taking their cue from the factory committees, which had since their inception desperately tried to keep production going. Thus, even if the factory committees as an institutional form were subordinated to the unions, it was the factory committees' definition of problems, i.e. the concern with the regulation of production, which triumphed.

In practice the decision to subordinate the factory committees to the trade unions remained as much of a pipe-dream as the contemporary decision to move towards the statisation of the unions. Civil war developments, such as the nationalisation of all industrial enterprises and the attempted restoration of one-man management, merely raised again - in a new form - the old problems about the scope of workers' control and the relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions. As late as April 1920 - two years after he had helped promote the fusion of the factory committees and the trade unions - Lozovskii could report to the Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions:

We must subordinate the work of the factory committees and collectives to complete control and to the complete influence of the trade unions. You know from the experience of the last two years, particularly of the last year, that very often the factory committees or collegia consider themselves absolutely independent of the unions.⁸⁸

88. Cited by Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy v bor'be, pp. 298-9.

It is clear from this remark that long after the formal integration of the factory committees into the union apparatus, factory committees still displayed that spirited independence and concern for self-management which had been a hallmark of their activity prior to 1918. They refused, in other words, to "commit suicide", as Ryazanov had urged at the First Congress of Trade Unions.

G. LENIN, THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS' CONTROL AFTER OCTOBER

Was the subordination of the factory committees to the trade unions proof that the Bolsheviks had merely supported the committees for opportunistic reasons prior to October? Lenin's first draft of the Decree on workers' control suggests not, for it ascribed far-reaching powers to the factory committees and placed heavy emphasis on grass-roots control rather than 'state workers' control'. This reflected Lenin's faith in the creativity of the masses - so much a feature of his thinking during the first three months of soviet power. He was intoxicated by the spectacle of workers, soldiers and peasants taking power into their own hands and profoundly optimistic about the potential inherent in such self-activity. In an article of late December entitled "How to Organise Competition", Lenin wrote:

One of the most crucial tasks at present, if not the most crucial, is to develop the independent initiatives of the workers and toilers and exploited generally in the sphere of creative, organisational work. At all costs, we must destroy that old, absurd, savage, vile and loathsome prejudice that only the so-called 'upper classes' can run the state.⁸⁹

89. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 35, p.198.

Nevertheless even when Lenin's thinking was its most libertarian, he did not abandon his belief in the necessity of complementing the independent initiatives of the masses with action at state level.

In early October he had reminded his Menshevik critics that:

We are for centralism and for a 'plan', but for centralism and for a plan by the proletarian state: proletarian regulation of production and distribution in the interests of the poor, the toilers and the exploited - against the exploiters.⁹⁰

After the overthrow of the Kerensky government it was the existence of a proletarian state which dominated his thinking. As winter set in, the honeymoon period of the revolution began to draw to a close, and the Bolshevik government became more and more aware of the appalling economic and social difficulties facing the country. To Lenin the existence of proletarian state power seemed to be the one beacon in the enveloping gloom. Increasingly, the theme of state initiative assumed precedence in his discourse over the theme of mass initiative.

With regard to workers' control, Lenin seems quickly to have qualified his initial optimism about the capacity of workers and peasants to resolve the economic crisis through their own efforts. More and more he insisted that only centralised, planned intervention by the state on a national scale could begin to tackle the anarchy induced in the economy by three years of war. At first Lenin does not appear to have had any definite position on whether the trade unions should supersede the factory committees as organs of economic regulation. The increasingly radical practice of workers'

90. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 34, p.320.

control in the winter of 1917, however, seems to have persuaded him and other leading Bolsheviks of the correctness of the arguments of those trade union leaders who castigated the factory committees for their parochial, tunnel-visioned approach to economic problems. As Lenin's commitment to centralised state regulation of the economy increased, he appears to have come round to the idea that the trade unions were better suited than the committees to the tasks of economic regulation, since they had their base not in the individual enterprise but in the branch of industry as a whole.

Workers' control of industry had begun in the early summer of 1917 as an attempt to minimise capitalist disruption of industry, but had entailed not just the maintenance of production, but the democratisation of the relations of production and the creation of new relations of production in which workers would display the maximum initiative, responsibility and creativity. It was this potential for workers' self-management which increasingly came to the fore as the movement for workers' control developed. Up to October the struggle to maintain production and the struggle to transform capitalist relations of production appeared to be two sides of the same coin. It seemed that the combination of workers' power in the enterprise and a transfer of state power to the soviets would bring about a socialist solution to the economic crisis. After October, however, the struggle for productivity and the struggle for workers' self-management suddenly seemed to be at odds with one another.

Although explicit references to 'self-management' are comparatively rare in the discourse of the factory committee leaders, the

concept was central to their perspectives. When workers talked in the spring and summer of the "democratic" factory, or later when they talked of taking the factory "into their own hands", they were talking about workers' self-management. After October this became an overriding concern. For in spite of the recognition on the part of factory committee leaders of the need for state regulation of the economy, they also recognised another reality, of which the trade union leaders and many of the Bolshevik leadership, including Lenin, were unaware. This was that the transfer of power to the soviets, and the transfer of legal ownership of the factories (i.e. nationalisation), would not by themselves bring an end to the oppression and subordination of the workers. In a vague, incoherent way, the factory committee leaders knew that unless the transfer of power to workers at the level of the state was accompanied by a transfer of power to them at the level of production, then the emancipation of labour would remain a chimera. What appears to be accelerating "anarchism" in the movement for workers' control after October is, in large part, a confused recognition that the organisation and techniques of production, the hierarchical relations of domination and authority and the old division of labour - in a word, capitalist relations of production - had to be totally transformed if socialism were to become a reality.

Lenin never developed any concept of workers' self-management. Until early 1918 he constantly drove home the importance of grass-roots initiatives by workers, but these were seen by him more as independent exercises in 'control' and 'accounting', than as attempts

to transform relations of production at enterprise level. As galloping industrial chaos overtook the soviet state, Lenin came increasingly to emphasise the need for strict labour discipline and centralisation. Shop-floor autonomy faded as a theme in his discourse. From March 1918 he began to call for the restoration of one-man management. In March, in The Current Tasks of Soviet Power, he wrote:

Any large-scale machine industry, and this is precisely the material productive source and foundation of socialism - calls for unconditional and strict unity of will, in order to coordinate the simultaneous work of hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of people...Unqualified submission to a single will is unconditionally necessary in the success of the labour processes, organised on the lines of large-scale machine industry.⁹¹

The gradual and uneven restoration of one-man management during the Civil War never caused Lenin to question the socialist character of the new soviet state. For socialism was measured, he believed, not by the degree of power exercised by workers on the shop floor, but by the character of the state. It was for this reason that he could view the nationalisation of major branches of industry on 28 June as bringing into being workers' management. Immediately after these nationalisations, Lenin declared to the Fifth Congress of Soviets on 4 July: "The old workers' control is now out of date, the trade unions are now being transformed into embryonic organs of management in the whole of industry".⁹²

91. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 36, p.200.

92. ibid., p.502.

By transferring ownership to the proletarian state, workers' control had been transmuted, at a stroke, into workers' management of industry. According to Lenin, the guarantee of the transition to socialism lay in the authentically proletarian character of the state rather than in the degree of dissolution of capitalist relations at the point of production. Because a state defending the interests of workers and poor peasants now presided over Russia, it was possible to organise production in a manner which would guarantee maximum efficiency - even if this involved reviving certain features of capitalism.

Although the factory committee leaders had an inchoate awareness that socialism would remain a mere formality unless the direct producers - and not just the state on their behalf - took over and radically reconstructed relations of production within the enterprise, they never really formulated this awareness in theoretical terms. Only the Left Communist faction of the Bolshevik party - and one Left Communist in particular - came near to registering, at a theoretical level, the importance of overcoming the separation of workers from the means of production during the transition to socialism. V.V. Osinskii (V.V. Obolenskii) was chairman of V.S.N.Kh. until March 1918, when he resigned because of his opposition to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In a brilliant article in the first number of the Left Communist journal in April 1918, entitled 'On Socialist Construction', Osinskii loosed a far-reaching critique of the official Bolshevik policy of socialist transition, central to which was the following insight:

...Although the transition to socialism is signalled by the nationalisation of enterprises, nationalisation of itself - i.e. the transfer of enterprises and state-ownership - is not, in any sense, equivalent to socialism. In order for nationalisation to have that significance, i.e. for it to become socialisation, it is necessary a) that the system of management of enterprises be constructed along socialist lines, so that capital's power of command is destroyed and so that in the arrangement of the enterprise there are no longer bases on which this command might be restored; b) it is necessary that the public authority (vlast'), into whose hands property in the means of production is transferred, is a proletarian authority...Is it possible for the proletarian élite (verkhushka), which will sit with the capitalists on the boards of the trusts, to guarantee that real proletarian power is in command in production? I very much doubt it, since the proletariat as a class will become a passive element, the object, rather than the subject of the organisation of labour in production.⁹³

He argued that unless the proletariat were actively involved in re-organising the process of production, then state capitalism, not socialism, would be the end-product of the government's policies. Although the practical proposals for workers' self-management which Osinskii outlined in the second part of this article were disappointingly sketchy, the article is still noteworthy as marking the limit-point to which any Bolshevik went in formally recognising the crucial importance of workers' self-management in a strategy of socialist transition. The fact that Osinskii was also chairman of V.S.N.Kh. is further proof that one cannot counterpose V.S.N.Kh. - the supposed embodiment of centralised planning - to the factory committees, the

93. Kommunist, 1, 20 April 1918, pp. 12-16; Kommunist, 2, 27 April 1918, pp. 5-17.

supposed embodiment of decentralised workers' control.

One should not exaggerate the significance of Osinskii's ideas. The Left Communists never really posed workers' self-management as a central aim, their theses of April 1918 merely mention the need for "the complete removal of capitalist and feudal survivals in the relations of production".⁹⁴ The factory committees strove in practice to transform relations of production at enterprise level, but their failure to theorise this practice in an alternative economic strategy helped to bring about their ultimate demise and that of workers' control.

94. Theses of the Left Communists (1918). Critique pamphlet, Glasgow, 1977, p.18. This was not true of Left Communists internationally such as A. Pannekoek, for whom workers' self-management was the quintessence of socialism. See Bricianer, S., Pannekoek et les conseils ouvriers, Paris, 1969.

II. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND WORKERS' SELF-MANAGEMENT, OCTOBER 1917 TO

JUNE 1918

From workers' control to workers' self-management

The October Revolution was a workers' revolution in the simple sense that it transferred state power to a government which enjoyed the support of a majority of the working class. As an essentially political act, it had little immediate effect on the daily lives of workers. The economic crisis, rapidly getting worse, was a far more important influence on their position than the Bolshevik seizure of power. Nevertheless at the subjective level, the advent to power of a soviet government had a profound effect on the way that workers perceived the deteriorating situation in the factories.

For a brief spell of two to three months, the October Revolution created a climate of hope similar to that which had been created by the February Revolution. Just as in March the workers of Petrograd had been fired by the desire to create a life of dignity and decency, so in November they were fired by the desire to incarnate the power of the people. The widespread mood of euphoria was captured by an observer, writing of the situation in Vasilevskii district at the time of the Bolshevik coup:

The mood of the workers is cheerful. A deep faith shines through their eyes. From dawn to dusk the doors of the Soviet and of the district committee (of the Bolshevik party, SAS) are never closed. Everywhere is full of people. The phone rings endlessly, calls from the factories continue the whole night. Factory committees are constantly on duty. From all sides you can hear: 'How are things?' 'We are winning.' 'We cannot but win.' 'Life is on our side.' 'If the peasants, workers and soldiers do not win, who can?'...

On Thursday, the 26th, at 7pm a joint meeting of the Soviet, the party collectives and factory committee representatives took place. It was immediately decided to send workers from the factories into the countryside to explain to the localities why power has gone to the soviets, why, without soviet power, the peasants will get no land, the workers no control and the exhausted nations no democratic peace. In all the speeches there is but one thought - to disperse to the remotest corners of the countryside, to spread light, to explain the transfer of power to the soviets and the government of the soviets.¹

The mood of the workers can be glimpsed through their resolutions and demands. Women printers on 31 October expressed

our warmest welcome to the first revolutionary government of working men, women and peasants... We are ready to fight for the sacred cause of the workers and for our demands. Long live the power of the soviets! Long live the demands of working women and men for bread, peace and land! Long live the united struggle of working women and men for the bright future, for the ideals of socialism!²

At the Obukhov works on 29 October the workers proclaimed:

We do not want bloodshed or violence in achieving those ideals for which we have striven for centuries, but we declare that anyone who opposes the realisation of our demands for land, peace and a Constituent Assembly will be considered an enemy, not a friend, whom we shall fight by every available means.³

On 28 October tram workers declared:

1. Oktyabr'skoe vooruzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde, M., 1957, p.896.
2. ibid., p.583.
3. ibid., p.573.

A curse on those who go against the will of the people! Down with False Socialists! Workers, soldiers, peasants unite in close ranks to fight for a genuinely popular revolutionary government! Long live the power of the soviets at the centre and in the localities! Long live the worldwide union of proletarians! Forward for a democratic peace, bread and land!⁴

It was the Decree on Workers' Control which most inspired the workers of Petrograd qua workers. Prior to October, factory committees had been at pains to stress that workers' control of production was not equivalent to the abolition of capitalism. Now the ease with which the Bolsheviks had toppled the Kerensky Government persuaded many factory militants that the time was ripe to follow up the political dispossession of the capitalist class with their economic dispossession. The inauguration of a government of workers and peasants, coupled with the break-up of the economy, seemed to many thousands of workers to toll the death-knell of capitalism. The Menshevik, Maiskii, speaking to the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in January 1918, remarked:

According to my observations, the majority of the proletariat, particularly in Petrograd, look on workers' control as an entry into the kingdom of socialism. It's precisely this psychology which creates huge dangers for the whole socialist movement in Russia in the future, because...if workers' control suffers defeat, then the masses will become disillusioned with the very idea of socialism.⁵

4. ibid., p.569.

5. Pervyi vserossiiskii s'ezd professional'nykh soyuzov, 7-14 yanvarya 1918g., M., 1918, p.200.

But most rank-and-file militants despised such jeremiads: they had won state power, what else was left to do except go forward to socialism? In the minutes of the Putilov works committee on 18 January 1918 the Bolshevik chairman, A. Vasil'ev, wrote:

The battles is still going on, but the hour of final victory is already near. We need only to strengthen the position we have so tirelessly achieved...The dawn of a new life is bursting brightly. The fatal hour for the bourgeois system has come. The bright reign of labour is beginning.⁶

The effect of the Decree on Workers' Control in many provincial areas was to initiate workers' control for the first time, but in Petrograd, where workers' control was already well-established, it had the effect of legitimising workers' control and, above all, of enlarging its scope. Most factory committees now set up special control commissions charged with overseeing and intervening in the running of the factory. Such commissions had already appeared in the summer in a few large factories, but now they sprang up everywhere. Not content merely to monitor stocks of fuel and raw materials, they checked orders, company finances, intervened in the technical side of production. Above all, they left employers in no doubt that they, the control commissions, were now in charge. Not surprisingly, the employers hit back.

On 22 November the Society of Factory and Works Owners in Petrograd published the following statement:

6. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, p.165.

We take the position that it is necessary for the government to participate in the direction and control of industry during war time, and are completely confident that the lawful government, which will be created by the Constituent Assembly, will authoritatively resolve all the problems of Russian industrial life.

We foresee that the Russian proletariat, being totally unprepared to direct the extremely complex industrial mechanism, will, by its decisive interference, bring this vital branch of the state, which is already shaken to its foundations, to rapid ruin...

We categorically reject non-state, class control by workers over the country's industrial life (as decreed by the government) since it does not, in practice, pursue national ends and is not recognised by the majority of the Russian population.⁷

Three days later an unofficial meeting of the biggest commercial and industrial organisations in Petrograd decided on a tough line:

"In the event of demands for workers' control being put forward... the enterprise must be closed". It argued that "the government, by completely handing over management of the factories into the hands of the working class is erecting a barrier to the further participation of capital in industrial life".⁸

The Decree stiffened the pugnacity of individual employers. At the Triangle rubber works the director, Pasternak, replied to attempts by the factory committee to set up a control commission as follows: "If you establish control, then I'll close the factory. I cannot work under control."⁹ At the Langenzippen works the owner

7. Cited by Lozovskii, A., Rabochii Kontrol', Pg., 1918, p.98.

8. Cited by Drobizhev, V.Z., Stroitel'stvo organov upravleniya promyshlennosti v SSSR v 1917-18gg., candidate dissertation, Moscow University, History Faculty, 1957, p.107.

9. Krasnyi Arkhiv, 103, 1940, pp. 124-5.

stormed out of the factory when the control commission attempted to impose far-reaching control over management. The factory committee refused to allow the owner back and it was still in dispute with the metal section of V.S.N.Kh. over this as late as autumn 1918.¹⁰ At the Nevskii footwear factory, management politely informed the control commission:

In answer to your memorandum of December 9, we consider it our duty to inform you that nowhere in the regulations on workers' control is anything said about the commission having the right to 'direct' management to do something and we consider that such a form of 'direction' - without any appeal - is utterly inadmissible under a democratic system.¹¹

A good insight into the industrial disputes which arose over attempts to institute far-reaching control can be gained by examining one enterprise in detail. At the Nevskii shipyard fuel shortages had drastically cut back production by the October Revolution. After the Bolsheviks seized power management waited, believing that the government could not hold power for long. The financial position in the enterprise was grave however: on 19 November it was announced that income had been 106,964 rubles, but expenditure 1,569,920 rubles. Management decided that as soon as war orders stopped, they would have to dismiss 2476 workers. On 16 November, in response to the Decree on Workers' Control, the factory committee set about extending its sphere of influence,

10. Pankratova, A.M., Fabzavkomy Rossii v bor'be za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku, M., 1923, pp. 245-6; Antonov, N., Dva goda diktatury proletariata v metallopromyshlennosti Petrograda, Pg., 1920, pp. 28-30.

11. LGIA, f. 1182, op. 1, d. 96, l.88.

but met with strong resistance from management. A week later, it demanded to have two representatives with voting rights on the board of the company, but management refused. The factory committee then demanded that no payments be made without its approval. Management pointed out that "to recognise your demand for actual control over the finances of the factory would not be in accordance with the Decree on Workers' Control, which does not envisage the right of workers to interfere in the management functions of the factory administration."¹² On 27 November the factory committee tried to occupy the finance office. On 3 December they requested the Military Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet to send a commission of experienced people to look into the affairs of the company. The next day government declared the factory under workers' control. On 8 December the factory committee insisted that all papers from management be countersigned by the factory committee. A few days later it announced that the present director of the shipyard would be replaced by the engineer, A.A. Yustitskii. Management then began to retreat. The board of the company were appointees of the government, the shipyard being a state enterprise, and therefore their personal investments were not at stake. On 23 December the board issued the following statement:

The company board of the Nevskii works is not the representative of capital, but the representative of the government, appointed by it not to exploit the enterprise in order to make share-holders rich, but to see that the enterprise functions properly from the government's point of view.

12. Payalin, N.P., Zavod im. Lenina, 1857-1918, M.L., 1933, p.405.

An agreement was thus reached with the factory committee, whereby the board of the company continued to manage the shipyard, whilst the factory committee checked books and accounts, raw materials and orders, correspondence and management decisions. This situation more or less worked, although there was much disgruntlement among shop-level management, who had no desire to cooperate with workers. However the new system of management could do little to rescue the factory from insolvency once war orders had dried up. On 17 January the shipyard was nationalised. By the time of the Civil War only 400 workers were left at the enterprise, compared to 7,500 in 1917.¹³

The newer radical style of workers' control tended to create conflict not only between workers and management but also between workers and clerical and technical staff. Most white-collar employees opposed the Bolshevik seizure of power and the Decree on Workers' control. The union of engineers, which represented senior, well-paid industrial engineers, at the beginning of November warned the new government that:

we will firmly protect the personal and professional dignity of our members and will give a firm rebuff to any attempt by any commissar or agent of the usurping government to give directions to the engineers, to interfere in their affairs, or force them to do anything by threat.¹⁴

13. ibid., pp. 401-7.

14. Tsyperovich, G., Petrogradskie profsoyuzy v oktyabre 1917g., M., 1927, p.48; for discussion of engineers' attitudes see Bailes, K.E., Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 22-3.

More junior technical personnel, represented by the union of foremen and technicians, were also hostile to the government but to a lesser extent. On 17 November a delegate meeting of the Petrograd branch of the union declared:

We have, from the moment our union was founded up to the present day, always regarded ourselves as an integral part of the proletariat and, together with them, have always been interested in strengthening the gains of labour over capital... And so we call on our members in the union to join with the workers and support them in their creative work by every means, without yielding to their political views, and to be respectful towards those organisations in the factory which receive the sanction of the proletariat. In cases of insult, abuse or infringement of your rights, the union will powerfully defend you, but our best defence will be tact and sincere love for the proletariat...Concerning the question of workers' control, we support the idea of workers' control on a broad state basis, but consider the Decree of the People's Commissar completely incompatible with present productive and economic relations, and, not wishing to take responsibility for the ruinous consequence of putting it into practice, we as an organisation will fight in the central organs of control to change that part of the draft which concerns the powers of the local control organs, so as to coordinate the operations of all enterprises.¹⁵

The All-Russian Congress of Clerical workers which met from 3 - 8 December took a similar position towards workers' control:

Congress considers the immediate and urgent task of the moment to be the rapid organisation of central, regional and local organs of control and regulation of industrial life. Such organisations, invested with authority, power and stability, can be created only by a central, democratic state power enjoying the popular recognition of a Constituent Assembly...Employees are recommended to take active part in the control of production...only in those circumstances

where a purely defensive control is being instituted for protection against possible sabotage.¹⁶

The distrust displayed by technical and clerical employees towards the Soviet government and towards the Decree on Workers' Control, in particular, sometimes led to battles between factory committees and white-collar workers. A good instance of this is provided by developments at the Putilov works. On 31 October 347 office-workers voted by 315 votes to 18, with 14 abstentions, for the following resolution:

We protest absolutely against the violent seizure of power by the Bolsheviks...and call on all the socialist parties to unite and speedily form a socialist ministry in which all the socialist parties are equally represented.¹⁷

However they voted unanimously not to strike, as employees in government ministries were doing. A couple of days later draughtsmen at the factory passed an almost identical resolution, sharply criticising the Bolsheviks for "the shedding of fraternal blood", by 97 votes to 11, with 12 abstentions.¹⁸ The mainly Bolshevik factory committee took a dim view of these resolutions. The alarm of the clerical and technical staff increased when the Military-Revolutionary Committee of the Petrograd Soviet appointed a commissar to the Putilov works - Nikolai Grigoriev, a former worker in the turret shop. They became enraged when, on 9 November, Grigoriev, in league with the factory committee, sent a worker to supervise clerical staff at work in their offices. They demanded

16. Kontorskii Trud, 3-4, December 1917, pp. 4, 8.

17. Kontorskii Trud, 2, November 1917, p.15.

18. Popov, A.A., Oktyabr'skii perevorot, Pg., 1918, p.399.

a meeting with the factory committee, but on arriving to negotiate with the committee at the works theatre, found it surrounded by soldiers and armed Red Guards. They refused to take part in the meeting under these conditions and 429 white-collar employees passed a resolution protesting against this infringement of freedom of assembly, and pointing out that the Military-Revolutionary Committee had forbidden armed persons to attend public meetings. They decided to break off relations with the factory committee.¹⁹ Workers from the shop committees, however, supported the factory committee's refusal to remove the armed guard, on the following grounds:

The factory committee, at this very anxious moment, is the headquarters defending the revolution and our comrades, the workers, are proud of it and loudly proclaim that from now on our labour organisations will go along the same path in defence of the oppressed, toiling people.

The factory committee is both an economic and a political organisation and so it shall remain, so long as it is the will of the masses who elected it.

The commissar of the factory was properly elected by the factory committee and confirmed by the Military-Revolutionary Committee. Refusal to submit to him is a refusal to submit to the government, and our comrades, the workers, will react fittingly to such insubordination.

We publicly reprimand those salaried employees who have abandoned the toiling family of workers...²⁰

Such antipathy between factory committees and white-collar workers was fairly widespread. Given the political hostility of clerical and technical staff to the Bolshevik government, it was difficult for factory committees to cooperate with them. Indeed

19. Kontorskii Trud, 2, p.15.

20. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets v trekh revolyutsiyakh, M., 1933, pp. 413-4.

some committees chose to treat salaried employees as straight-forward class enemies - no better than the bosses. At the Robert Krug engineering works the committee asked technical personnel to sign a pledge to abide by the decisions of the workers' organisations and to recognise the government of People's Commissars. The technicians refused to sign it and the committee threatened to hand them over to a military-revolutionary tribunal for counter-revolutionary activity.²¹ The technicians resigned rather than submit. At the Skorokhod shoe factory on 12 December the committee announced that

whoever is caught making counter-revolutionary propaganda against the government of the Council of People's Commissars and of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, against any revolutionary organisation or against present revolutionary tactics, will be handed over immediately by the committee for trial by a revolutionary tribunal.²²

As the economy collapsed around them and as factory committees became more obstreperous, capitalists lost the will to carry on. Some began to run down their operations, refusing new orders (if there were any) and selling off stock, fuel and raw materials. Some began to squander their capital or transfer their assets abroad. Others stopped paying wages, claiming that this was now the responsibility of the government. Frequently factory owners simply abandoned the sinking ship. "The owner has vanished" became a plaintive cry of factory committees in December 1917. At the

21. Lozovskii, op. cit., p.55.

22. Papernikov, Ya. S., Ocherk po istorii Leningradskogo soyuza rabochikh kozhevnikov, L., 1930, p.156.

Bromley Mill, for instance, almost all the members of the board fled to England. At the First Yarn Mill, when the factory committee announced that it would henceforth pay management their salaries, the English directors, who had been at the factory for twenty-five years, decided that it was time to pack their bags and go abroad.²³ The response of factory committees was to tighten their control; their attitude became ever more punitive and, inevitably, excesses occurred.

Critics of the factory committees levelled two somewhat contradictory charges against them. On the one hand, they were accused of having regard only for the interests of their individual factories, and of being ready to team up with the employers in order to compete against other factories for scarce resources and government subsidies. On the other hand, they were accused of having no regard for production, and of being obsessed with expropriating the employers and with establishing producer communes. Some factory committees, particularly in the South of Russia, were no doubt guilty of these things, but it would be wrong to imagine that the majority were either narrowly self-regarding or deludedly anarchistic. In Petrograd most factory committees behaved in a remarkably responsible fashion, in view of the severe economic difficulties.

Instances of factory committee selfishness in the capital were few. Occasionally, committees would refuse to share their scarce resources with other factories, such as when the shop stewards at the Metal Works turned down a request for fuel from the Nevskii shipyard.²⁴ In a touching act of self-criticism, the committee at

23. Leningradskie tekstilya, 1927, 6-7, p.10.

24. Novyi Put', 6-8, 25 March 1918, p.2.

the Copper-Rolling works confessed on 8 November that:

until recently the role of the committee has been truly lamentable. To a large extent, the committee has served as a weapon in the hands of the director... it went about trying to get orders, fuel, materials and resources. It played the role of intermediary between management and workers and remained silent when energy, resources and materials were wasted.²⁵

Such avaricious particularism was rare in Petrograd—in striking contrast to the benevolent altruism of the committees in general. The tendency towards particularism of another kind, however, viz. towards anarchist particularism, was rather more common.

After the October Revolution anarchists began to step up their campaign for factory seizures. Golos Truda, the anarcho-syndicalist journal, ran an article on 3 November which said:

We affirm that it is not state power which needs to be seized, but production, because with the seizure of production we destroy both capitalism and the state at one blow and we will replace both of them with a genuinely socialist society, resting on real freedom, equality and brotherhood.²⁶

At the Fifth Factory Committee Conference, from 15-16 November, at which about 8% of the delegates were anarchists,²⁷ the anarchist Terentiev declared:

25. Venediktov, A.V., ed., Natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti i organizatsiya sotsialisticheskogo proizvodstva v Petrograde, 1917-20gg., vol. I, L., 1958, pp. 34-5.

26. Golos Truda, 3 November 1917, p.1.

27. Kanev, S.N., Oktyabr'skaya revolyutsiya i krakh anarkhizma, M., 1974, p.165.

We must take over both works and factories... control is possible only when everything is ours and this is impossible so long as there are factory owners. The first thing we must do is requisition the factories.²⁸

Reven, an anarchist from the Baltic shipyard, continued in the same vein: "The Decree on Workers' Control is slowing down the movement. To go forward we must remember that the Decree is not our idol."²⁹

These notions proved attractive to some groups of workers. In the textile factories of Petrograd, for instance, several attempts were made by workers to take over the running of their factories. Popular anarchist militants like Troshin, a worker at the Kozhevnikovskaya textile mill, Kotov and Kolovich went about calling on workers to seize the factories for themselves.³⁰ At the Kersten knitwear factory, where women comprised three-quarters of the workforce, the factory committee arrested the manager because of his refusal to recognise their spokesman, the mechanic Tseitlin. The clerical workers went on strike in protest at this. On 22 November an anarchist proposed to a general meeting that the workers divide up the factory property among themselves. Aleksandra Kollontai, who had been sent to speak on behalf of the Bolsheviks, managed to dissuade the women from this, but she was unable to dissuade the committee from trying to run the factory by itself. It had no money and though it tried to raise capital out of wage deductions and received a small loan from the Vulcan works, it was soon forced to abandon its experiment because of financial difficulties. The committee called on the Ministry of Labour to

28. Cited by Drobizhev, op. cit., p.115.

29. ibid.

30. Perazich, V., Tekstili Leningrada v 1917g., L., 1927, p.80.

sequester the factory, but at that point the textileworkers' union intervened to bring about a reconciliation between the committee and management, who agreed to recognise Tseitlin.³¹

It is crucial not to exaggerate the influence of anarchism on the movement for workers' control, however. Factory seizures were a rarity in the capital compared to areas like the Donbass or Urals, where they were fairly common. According to the judicious calculations of V.Z. Drobizhev, only 27 factories in Petrograd province were taken from their owners between November and March 1918. On closer inspection, however, ~~few~~ of these take-overs turn out to have been inspired by an anarchist desire to be rid of the bosses.^{32.}

At the Metal Works, where Bolshevik influence was paramount,³³ the October Revolution encouraged the works committee to extend workers' control in the direction of workers' self-management. On 22 November the committee set up a workers' directorate, consisting of nine workers elected by the workforce, to achieve "direct, active participation in the management of production and of the factory, and liaison with government and private institutions and personnel on an equal basis with the company directors".³⁴ The directorate was to sit on all boards in order to "supervise and direct" their work. Management lost no time in informing the workers' directorate that it would not tolerate such "interference in management by outsiders, not responsible for their actions", as this

31. Tkach, 2, December 1917, p.15; Leningradskie tekstilya, 6-7, p.8.

32. Drobizhev, V.Z., Glavnyi shtab sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti, M., 1966, p.99.

33. In new elections to the Petrograd Soviet at the beginning of December, in which over three-quarters of the Metal workforce took part, the Bolsheviks won 71% of the votes, the Left SR's 21% and the Mensheviks 2%. Potekhin, M.N., Pervyi sovet proletarskoi diktatury, L., 1966, p.387.

34. Rabochii Kontrol' v promyshlennykh predpriyatiakh Petrograda 1917-1918gg., vol. 1, L., 1947, pp. 254-5.

would bring ruin on the firm, which was the property of the directors. On 1 December management closed the factory, rather than submit and the workers took over. Within a week, however, the factory was forced to close down: by March only 276 workers were left.³⁵

At the Robert Krug engineering works, where 190 workers were employed, a general meeting issued the following statement on 12 December:

Having heard a report from the control commission about the conflict which took place between the commission and management at a meeting on 11 December, when management stated clearly and unambiguously that it did not recognise the works committee, the control commission or the Instructions on Workers' Control, and when a management representative, (citizen) Lerkhe, clearly hinted at stopping production at the factory...the general meeting of workers and sluzhashchie has decided:-

- 1) not to allow such sabotage
- 2) to avert the final closure of the factory, and the unemployment which would ensue from this
- 3) to take the factory into its own hands.³⁶

This was no wild seizure, for the workers asked that the Factory Convention supervise the running of the factory. Self-management could not negate economic realities, however, and on 9 March 1918 the factory closed.³⁷ The story at the Aivaz works was rather similar. A control commission, comprising seven workers and four sluzhashchie, was set up in December, to counterpose to "the uncontrolled, unorganised conduct of the economy by the capitalists", "the idea of public control, organisation and regulation of economic

35. Spisok fabrichno-zavodskikh predpriyatii Petrograda, Pg., 1918, p.20.

36. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 279, 283.

37. ibid., p.316; Spisok, p.26.

life in the interests of the exploited class".³⁸ Management refused to work under a control commission and on 23 December announced the closure of the factory. The factory committee took over the running of the enterprise, but closure was only deferred until March.³⁹

The experience of the committee at the Gofman leather factory, which employed about fifty workers, was rather more positive. On 25 November the committee complained that "the boss has fled and left the factory and the workers to the mercy of fate, without money and with scarcely any management." The committee successfully ran the factory with the help of the district soviet.⁴⁰ As in the autumn, self-management proved most viable in small factories; at a number of small workplaces, including the Kibbel' lithography, the Kan paper mill, the Berthold press, workers removed the bosses to avert closure and ran production themselves. At larger factories self-management was a far more difficult proposition, as the examples of the Metal, Aivaz and Robert Krug works show. The key consideration prompting workers to take over the factories was not ^{so much} the desire for self-management, as a desire to save their jobs. In some cases, workers forced out the old bosses, or took over from them after they had abandoned their enterprises, solely in order to force the government to nationalise the enterprises. It is very important to understand the connection which was made by workers between self-management and nationalisation, for it suggests that even in cases where workers took over their factories, the pre-

38. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 230-1.

39. Spisok, p.23.

40. Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 230-1.

dominant motive was not "anarchistic".

The factory committees and 'nationalisation from below'

When the Bolsheviks came to power they did not intend to nationalise the whole of industry. Their chief aim was to nationalise the banks so as to give the government some control over the financial system. On 14 December the banks were nationalised by the simple expedient of sending commissars and Latvian riflemen to the 24 private banks in Petrograd and forcing the cashiers to hand over the keys to their desks and to the vaults. There was no clear policy regarding the nationalisation of industry. Lenin hoped that it would be possible to operate some form of 'state capitalism', in which private capital would function under workers' control and the benign direction of the government, but he was unclear about its significance. Sometimes he talked about "state capitalism in our conditions as the greatest progress" (on one occasion going so far as to say that "even under Kerensky state capitalism would be a huge step forward"); at other times, he talked mysteriously about "teaching socialism to the organisers of trusts". On this question, as on many others, it was the Left Communists who were the more theoretically cogent. Bukharin demolished Lenin's notion of 'state capitalism' ("a nonsense, a half-baked idea") in an article in Kommunist, in which he argued that state capitalism meant the "dictatorship of finance capital" and that "a proletarian-peasant dictatorship which does not entail the expropriation of the expropriators, which does not eliminate the power of capital in the works and factories, can only be a

temporary phenomenon".⁴¹ V.S.N.Kh. was something of a compromise between these two positions: in line with Lenin's notion of state capitalism, it aimed to set up state-controlled trusts, on the boards (glavki) of which would sit government and trade-union representatives to oversee the operations of private and state-owned factories; in line with the Left Communists, it envisaged some provision for limited nationalisation. Nevertheless in December 1917, when V.S.N.Kh. was set up, there was no intention of moving quickly towards nationalisation. In the event, action by workers at the grass roots forced this on the government.

Up to October demands by workers in Petrograd for nationalisation were very infrequent - probably because the government already owned key sectors of industry. After October, industrial dislocation, together with acute class struggle, caused some factory committees to oust their managements and to demand that the government 'sequesterate' (i.e. appoint a board of management) or 'nationalise' (i.e. take into full state ownership) their factories. A grass roots movement in favour of nationalisation began to develop. At the Sixth (and last) Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees on 25 January, the Bolshevik, M.N. Zhivotov, reported that "a number of declarations are coming from factory committees about the need to transfer enterprises into the hands of the workers and thus, unexpectedly, the practical question of nationalising production arises".

Milyutin observed some time later that:

41. Kommunist, 3, 16 May 1918; Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, Pelican edn. 1966, pp. 83-88; 95-105.

the process of nationalisation went on from below and the Soviet leaders could not keep up with it, could not take things in hand, in spite of the fact that many orders were issued which forbade local organisations to enact nationalisations by themselves.⁴²

He remarked that many of these local 'nationalisations' had a punitive character. In order to punish factory owners for their contumacy, factory committees either alone, or with the help of a local soviet or sovnarkhoz, chose to expropriate them.⁴³ Of 836 warrants issued to dispossess factory owners between November and March, 77% were issued by local bodies - eloquent testimony to the fact that the pressure towards nationalisation came from below.⁴⁴ In Petrograd these grass roots nationalisations were not as common as in the provinces. The government agreed to nationalise the huge factories of the capital which were already state-controlled but not state-owned, such as the Nevskii shipyard, the Putilov works and the Franco-Russian works, but it was also forced in the winter and spring to nationalise a handful of small enterprises, which it felt were economically important. These included the Military-Horseshoe Factory (formerly Possel'), the Puzyrev and Russo-Baltic automobile works, the Leman letter-foundry, the Armature Works and two small engine-repair shops.⁴⁵

At the Sixth Conference of Factory Committees, the link between nationalisation and workers' self-management was expressly

42. Milyutin, V.P., Sovetskoe ekonomicheskoe razvitie Rossii v diktature proletariata, M., 1918, p.85.

43. Drobizhev, Glavnyi Shtab, p.99.

44. ibid.

45. Spisok, passim.

made. The resolution passed by the conference demanded:

all factories, works and mines whose owners do not recognise workers' control, who are overtly engaged in sabotage, who no longer wish to continue production in the enterprises and are not concerned to guarantee the conditions of production in the enterprises, must immediately be transferred into the ownership of the proletarian Republic.⁴⁶

Starting from the premise that "the political power (vlast') of the proletariat can only be real power under conditions of its economic rule (gospodstvo)", the resolution went on to link the call for nationalisation to a demand for self-management:

In view of the fact that the supreme government bodies have no special organs capable of running the enterprises transferred into ownership of the republic, and in view of the fact that the government of workers, soldiers and peasants is strong only so long as it rests on the trust of the toilers and their organisations, in all cases of nationalisation, the workers' committees should be put in charge of the enterprises in the localities and should work under the direction of V.S.N.Kh.⁴⁷

The resolution was passed unanimously, with six abstentions, which included the six anarcho-syndicalist delegates at the conference.⁴⁸

V.S.N.Kh. turned down the proposal, but it was unable to stop factory committees from 'nationalising' their own enterprises and presenting the government with a fait accompli. From April onwards, the government began to face up to the fact that it must centrally coordinate the wave of local 'nationalisations'. On 23

46. Novyi Put', 4-5, 25 February 1918, p.13.

47. ibid., p.14.

48. ibid., p.13.

June 1918 it changed gear decisively when it nationalised the metal and metallurgical industries - followed later by textiles, chemicals, electrical and leather industries.⁴⁹

Economic Catastrophe and the Dissolution of the Proletariat

The radicalisation of workers' control is usually considered to be a major cause of spiralling chaos in the economy. In fact it was less of a cause and more of a response to that chaos - which had its roots in the whole system of war capitalism. The crisis of Petrograd industry, which had been building up since summer, came to a head in December and January when the war came to an end. The moment the Bolsheviks sued for peace, the bottom fell out of the economy. Narkomtrud (the People's Commissariat of Labour) had begun in December to draw up plans for the orderly demobilisation of the war industries and for the evacuation of all those who would lose their jobs as a consequence of the run-down of armaments production. It envisaged that experienced, skilled workers would remain as a small nucleus within the demobilised factories to oversee the transfer to civilian production. The majority of less experienced workers would be encouraged to leave Petrograd, the Labour Exchange paying their travelling expenses. In the event, nothing came of these plans. The shut-down of factories and the axeing of the workforce took place in a totally unplanned, chaotic fashion. In the New Year the plight of thousands

49. Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, p.104.

of workers, facing the loss of their jobs, was suddenly compounded by a cut in the bread ration and the prospect of a German invasion of Petrograd. On 27 January the bread ration was reduced to 150 grams per day, on 14 February to 100 grams and on 28 February to 50 grams.⁵⁰ Mass starvation was setting in. This, together with the imagined horrors of a German occupation, induced panic in the population and an exodus from the capital. Those who had ties with the countryside hurried back to their native villages in the hope of qualifying for some of the land that was being distributed. Others, dismissed from their jobs, set off from the capital in the hope of finding food. In the first six months of 1918 over a million people fled from the capital.⁵¹

Within a matter of months the proletariat of Red Petrograd, renowned throughout Russia for its outstanding role in the revolution, was decimated. By April 1918 the factory workforce of the capital had plummeted to about 40% of its January 1917 level, and thereafter it shrank still further.⁵² The branches of industry which suffered most were those producing directly for the war effort - metalworking and engineering, shipbuilding, chemicals, woodworking. In the metal factories of Petrograd province, which employed more than a hundred workers, the workforce slumped from 197,686 on 1 January to 57,995 on 1 May.⁵³ Less severely affected were light industries, such as textiles, food, paper and printing. Big factories suffered more than small factories: private metal works suffered more than

50. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, 1919, p.35.

51. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue 1, Pg., 1918, p.19.

52. ibid., p.18.

53. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 5, Pg., 1919, p.33.

state-owned metal works. Those factories which had expanded most dramatically during the war, contracted most dramatically when the war ended.⁵⁴ On 28 February 1918 the huge Triangle rubber works closed down: within a matter of weeks only 756 of its 15,000 staff remained.⁵⁵

Soviet historians, such as Drobizhev and Vdovin, argue that it was the less experienced, less proletarianised workers who left Petrograd, leaving a nucleus of 'cadre' workers more or less intact.⁵⁶ The exiguous evidence does not bear this out. It is true that of those who applied to the Central Commission for the Evacuation of Petrograd (later to the City Labour Exchange) for travelling expenses to leave the capital, no less than 53% were chernorabochie.⁵⁷ However only a small proportion of those who left the city claimed travelling expenses and these were most likely to have been the worst-off workers i.e. precisely the unskilled. Women workers were actually less harshly affected by demobilisation than male workers, since they were concentrated in light industry. Other evidence suggests that the process of demobilisation was so cataclysmic, that skilled as well as unskilled workers were affected and that many proletarianised workers departed for the countryside in search of food, even though their ties to rural society were extremely attenuated.⁵⁸ One must not forget

54. ibid., p.43.

55. Krasnyi Treugol'nik na putyakh oktyabrya, L., 1927, p.19.

56. Vdovin, A.I. and Drobizhev, V.Z., Rost rabocheho klassa SSSR, 1917-40gg., M., 1976, p.77.

57. Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, p.38.

58. This was the view of Gilbert, M.I., 'K voprosu o sostave promyshlennykh rabochikh SSSR v gody grazhdanskoi voiny', Istoriya proletariata SSSR, 1934, no. 3 and 1935, no. 1; and also of the Left SR I.Z. Steinberg, Znanya Truda, 213, 16 May 1918, p.1.

finally, that a large number of the most revolutionary workers left the factories of the capital in order to spread the gospel of revolution. Young workers, fired by revolutionary elan and without family commitments, were among the first to volunteer to serve in the food detachments, the Red Army, or government and party agencies. Over half of those who claimed evacuation expenses were single men, and by April, the proportion of youths in the factory workforce had dropped to a third of the level of the previous year.⁵⁹

The economic chaos which was engulfing Russia, the staggering rise in unemployment and the dearth of food gave rise to violent disenchantment in sections of the working class. Calls to 'smash', 'bring down' or 'occupy' evoked a warm response amongst some. In February, for example, the government warned factory committees to be ready to destroy machinery in case of Germans actually invading Petrograd. This precipitated an orgy of machine-breaking in a few factories, in spite of the fact that the Germans came no nearer than Pskov. This destructive, negative feeling found expression in conflicts between employed and unemployed workers, in attacks on skilled workers and even in pogroms. At the Metal Works, where conflict between skilled and unskilled workers had been an ongoing problem, chernorabochie beat up union delegates after mass redundancies were announced.⁶⁰ At the Siemens-Schuckert works 7,000 workers, who had been made redundant, threatened violence to those who had kept their jobs. On 17 April at the Obukhov works unemployed workers picketed the factory to prevent workers from entering.

59. Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, issue 1, p.18.
Materialy po statistike truda, issue 6, p.36.

60. Kleinbort, L.M., Istoriya bezrabotitsy v Rossii, 1857-1919, M., 1925, p.288.

A meeting of unemployed workers from Vyborg district issued a declaration under the signature of "the party of the unemployed", which proclaimed: "the people have now come to understand the dirty deeds of the Yids. Jews have settled on all the councils. We suggest that they leave Petrograd within three days".⁶¹ Parallel to these elemental, destructive moods went a growth of apathy in certain quarters. Disillusionment with politics was a phenomenon noted by all parties, including even the Mensheviks, whose fortunes in general waxed as a result of deepening economic crisis and concomitant disaffection with the Bolsheviks. In the internal Menshevik party newspaper a member noted:

the growth of political indifferentism, expressed in poor attendance at meetings and lectures, which is typical of all working-class political parties, including the ruling party...notwithstanding the fact that considerations of a careerist kind ought to encourage many to go along to Bolshevik party meetings.⁶²

In spite of this complaint, however, Mensheviks and SR's did manage to benefit from the growth of discontent towards the Bolsheviks.

The right-wing socialist parties, battered but unbowed, were quick to exploit the many discontents which arose as a result of the demobilisation of the war industries. They began to agitate among the unemployed, but the main thrust of their work was directed towards getting factories to elect deputies to a city-wide body which they hoped would act as a counter-weight to the Petrograd Svoiet, and ultimately displace it. In early March, 150 delegates from factories in the Rozhdestvenskii district met to discuss un-

61. ibid., pp. 288-9.

62. Partiinye Izvestiya, 1-2, 5 March 1918, p.27.

employment and the peace of Brest-Litovsk and expressed support for the idea of an Emergency Meeting of Deputies:

The soviets have become diplomatic chancelleries, ministries, judicial courts, police departments for the workers' and peasants' government, but have ceased to be the political representatives of the proletariat. The state officials of the soviet have dug themselves in and declared new elections illegal.⁶³

On 7 March general meetings of workers at the Maxwell textile mill and Nevskii shipyard agreed to send delegates to the Emergency Meeting being called by the Mensheviks. The engine works of the Nikolaev railway elected four delegates to the meeting, and workers in the carriage shops of the same line agreed that "so long as the Bolshevik government continues, nothing can be put right".⁶⁴ At the Pipe Works demobilisation caused the workers to call the Bolshevik politicians "cheats" and party members were not allowed to speak at factory meetings. At the Putilov works seven of the shops agreed to take part in the Emergency Meeting i.e. about 2,000 out of the 13,000 workers left at the factory. N.N. Glebov's independent workers' group gained ground, announcing:

We declare honestly and unequivocally that we have lost all faith in elites (verkh) and believe that the salvation of the working class can only lie in the self-activity of the workers.⁶⁵

63. Den', 6, 31(18) March 1918, p.7.

64. Partiinnye Izvestiya, 4, 13 March 1918, p.8.

65. Krasnaya Letopis', 1928, no. 3, p.153; Den', 5, 30(17) March 1918, p.4.

On 4 April workers in Number One district of the Putilov works condemned attempts by the government to stop the Emergency Meetings from taking place and to denigrate them as 'counter-revolutionary':

We declare that there is no counter-revolution in working-class circles. We are sufficiently mature and class-conscious to defend our class interests as toilers by our own efforts.⁶⁶

On 12 April the first general meeting was held at Putilov for two months and a large minority castigated the works committee for not satisfying the demands of the workers, although they were constantly heckled and booed.⁶⁷

The Emergency Meeting of Deputies met for the first time in mid-March. Deputies were sent from all the largest factories, including the Putilov, Obukhov, Metal, Pipe, Cartridge, Okhta and Izhorsk works. According to Menshevik claims, some 52 factories sent deputies. Of 110 who answered a questionnaire, 42 were members of no political party, 35 were Mensheviks, 33 SR's and one a Popular Socialist.⁶⁸ The Meetings discussed the burning economic issues of unemployment and food shortages, but, above all, the growing lack of democracy in the soviets, factory committees and trade unions. Deputies complained that factory committees were refusing to submit to reelection, that they were behaving like the old managers. Others complained that the unions no longer defended the workers, being solely concerned with productivity. The soviets

66. Den', 12, 7 April (25 March) 1918, p.4.

67. Novyi Den', 20, 17(4) April 1918, p.4.

68. Den', 7, 2 April (20 March) 1918, p.2.

were denounced as bureaucratic agencies of government; the Bolsheviks as opportunists and careerists, who maintained their power through the use of bayonets rather than through popular support.⁶⁹ The Meetings continued through April, but the movement lost momentum in May. The failure of the attempt to organise a one-day strike against the Bolshevik government on 2 July led to the collapse of the Meetings.⁷⁰

The Emergency Meetings were the chief sign of growing working-class opposition to the Bolsheviks, which was the result of unemployment, food shortages and the manipulation of popular organisations by the party. This increasing hostility was cause for concern to party leaders. Kollontai bewailed the fact that:

The absorption of the most active party workers in government affairs of a technical-bureaucratic and narrowly-commissarial character has caused a pronounced rift between former party activists and the masses. The mass of women workers naively expected a sharp change in their life and situation the day after the October Revolution and are now losing patience. Those who should explain the position, who should support them in their hour of need, have been drawn into other work, setting up the state apparatus. And there is always hunger.⁷¹

Ivan Turunen wrote from the Putilov works:

We have thrown all our best worker-revolutionaries to the Front and have left the party class-conscious workers to the mercy of enemies of the revolution and opponents of soviet power.⁷²

69. Some of the proceedings of these emergency meetings were re-published by A. Solzhenitsyn in Kontinent, 1975, no. 2, see especially pp. 389-91.

70. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 2, 15 July 1918, p.17; Shelavin, K.I., 'Men'sheviki i revolyutsiya', Krasnaya Letopis', 2 (41) 1931, p.20.

71. Kollontai, A., Rabotnitsa za god revolyutsii, Pg., 1918, pp. 18-19.

72. Petrogradskaya Pravda, 59, 27(14) March 1918.

The disillusionment with the Bolsheviks expressed itself in a reaction against the party at elections. In late March in soviet elections at the Putilov forge Bolshevik candidates each received an average of 75 votes, compared to the SR's average of 229.⁷³

At the Artillery Depot the SR's got 110 votes, the Bolsheviks 91 votes, non-party candidates 77 and Left SR's 13 votes in new soviet elections.⁷⁴ On 10 April 9,699 printers elected a new board to the Petrograd union; the Bolsheviks got 36% of the votes compared to 64% for the Menshevik/SR/Unemployed list.⁷⁵ Not surprisingly, in view of these results, the Bolsheviks were none too keen on allowing elections at this time. At the Pipe Works general meetings four times demanded fresh elections to the works committees, but the committee turned down the demands. Similar demands at the Nobel and Old Lessner works were ignored.⁷⁶ At the Langenzippen works the committee refused to hold new elections until production was back to normal. Workers invaded the works committee office, but the Petrograd Soviet supported the ban on new elections.⁷⁷ At the Cartridge Works the factory committee refused to allow a meeting to demand new elections to take place. The Emergency Meeting of Delegates deplored this action as symptomatic of:

73. Novyi Den', 15, 11 April (29 March) 1918, p.4.

74. Novyi Den', 13, 9 April (27 March) 1918, p.4.

75. Novyi Den', 26, 24(11) April 1918, p.4.

76. Kontinent, 1975, 2, pp. 389-90.

77. Novaya Zhizn', 60, 23 March 1918, p.4.

the system of terror, violence and tyranny in which one section of the workers has become a tool of the service of the government, bringing discord and demoralisation into the ranks of the working class and ultimately disorganising and weakening it.⁷⁸

One should beware of exaggerating the extent of working-class opposition to the Bolshevik government, and thus of the extent to which the Bolsheviks were compelled to rely on force rather than popular consent. One of the major reasons why the Mensheviks and SR's were able to turn economic discontent into an anti-Bolshevik direction was, as Kollontai and the worker Turunen both pointed out, because the Bolsheviks had lost most of their activists in the factories. In the autumn of 1917 there had been around 43,000 members of the party in Petrograd, two-thirds of whom were workers active at the grass roots in winning their workmates to Bolshevik policies.⁷⁹ A year later, only 3,599 people responded to a survey of all Petrograd party members by the Central Committee. This suggests that the membership had plummeted to about a tenth of its size a year previously, owing to unemployment, the disbandment of the garrison and, especially, to the exit of workers into the Red Army and government and party organs. The party remained, however, overwhelmingly proletarian: 81.5% of members in September 1918 were workers (55.4% of whom were metalworkers); only 18% were sluzhashchie or intelligentsia. 90% of members were male, and although women now

78. Novyi Den', 16, 12 April (30 March) 1918, p.4.

79. Stepanov, Z.V., Rabochie Petrograda v period podgotovki i provedeniya oktyabr'skogo vooruzhennogo vosstaniya, M.L., 1965, pp. 28-9.

comprised about 40% of the industrial labour force of Petrograd, only 7% of worker-members were women. Almost a third of the membership were aged 25 or under, and 90% were under 40. Most were recent recruits: 47% had joined the party in 1917 and a further 34% in 1918; 10% had joined from other political parties. A mere 6.5% of members had secondary education and a tiny 0.8% had higher education. This was thus a party which had lost its experienced membership and which consisted overwhelmingly of young male workers new to politics.⁸⁰

Notwithstanding this stupendous loss of 'cadres', the Bolsheviks were never seriously threatened by the swing to the Mensheviks and SR's. They had built up enormous reserves of working-class support in 1917, which were not easily squandered. Conversely, the Mensheviks and SR's could not easily overcome the deep antipathy which they had earned because of their role in conciliating the Kerensky government. The swing to the moderate socialists was definitely a minority phenomenon, affecting, as we have seen, about a fifth of workers at the Putilov works. On 7 April 1918 Bolshevik workers wrote to Petrogradskaya Pravda, describing the mood of workers in the different districts of the capital. A worker from the Vyborg district wrote:

The large factories are at a standstill...
Many new members are enrolling in our party.
There is a big stream of recruits into the
Red Army. There is discontentment with the
food difficulties and unemployment, but it
is not directed against the soviet government.⁸¹

80. Statistika Truda, 1-4, 1919, pp. 14-15.

81. Petrogradskaya Pravda, 68, 7 April 1918.

In Moscow district a writer reported:

In individual factories there are internal misunderstandings of various kinds...Against the Soviet government as such, however, there is not only no hostility, but full recognition and direct communication.⁸²

I.Z. Steinberg, the Left SR critic of the Bolsheviks, concluded an article on the Emergency Meeting of Deputies by saying that they were not representative of the whole of the working class and that support for the soviet system was still the norm.⁸³ Perhaps the most telling proof of the limited influence of the Mensheviks and SR's lay in their failure to organise a one-day strike. Grievances to fuel a strike were plenty, but the Bolsheviks successfully managed to mobilise working-class opinion against the proposal.

The Labour Organisations and the Crisis of Labour Discipline

As unemployment and starvation pulverised the working class, the problem of labour discipline grew ever worse, and it was to this problem that the labour organisations addressed themselves in early 1918. We saw that from their inception factory committees took an active interest in labour discipline and productivity. Central to the practice of the labour movement as a whole was a dialectic between democracy and discipline. After October the democratic impulse drove the factory committees towards self-management, whilst the disciplinary impulse encouraged the committees and unions towards

82. ibid.

83. Znamya Truda, 213, 16 May 1918, p.1.

active participation in building a centralised economic apparatus and in raising the level of the productive forces.

It is no exaggeration to say that there was an almost total breakdown of work discipline by the time the Bolsheviks came to power. How to keep workers working was a problem which neither factory committees nor trade unions could ignore and it was a major topic of discussion at a joint conference of factory committees and trade unions in the metal industry which took place on 18 November. A delegate from the small Karsak works bewailed the situation in the following terms:

We really need strict discipline. When you tell workers that the interests of industry are far from coinciding with the interests of the industrialists, but with the interests of the workers, the workers say: 'But what's in it for us? Give us a rise. The bosses are getting rich, so give us a decent wage.' Some of them suppose that because Lenin is in power, rivers of gold will begin to flow. Yet without the activity of the masses, it is impossible to resolve the crisis. The masses must show greater self-sacrifice.⁸⁴

The delegate from the Cable works, Zolotnikov, took up this lamentation:

The masses do not want discipline and say that there is no freedom. At our place they work only two days a week and for the rest of the time are paid two-thirds the basic rate according to the tariff agreement. We (i.e. the committee) proposed that we use the spare time to work on transport, but the workers wouldn't agree, preferring to receive payment for stoppages. To our entreaties, they replied that we were in league with the Society of Factory and Works Owners. The masses demand only wage rises and do not understand that they themselves now bear responsibility for the fate of the country.⁸⁵

84. Vserossiiskaya tarifnaya konferentsiya soyuzov metallistov, Pg., 1918, p.113.

85. ibid., p.116.

Other delegates agreed with this analysis but pointed out that it was hunger, rather than selfishness, which was causing workers to refuse to work.

The conference passed the following resolution by nearly 200 votes to 4, with 13 abstentions:

Conference considers inadmissible the arbitrary violation of decisions taken by the responsible organisations of the working class and by the trade unions and calls on comrades in the localities to firmly restrain the masses from all actions contradicting the decrees of the leading organs of the union. Every breach of organised discipline is a violation of the will of the organised workers and puts the violator outside the protection and defence of the organisation. Conference decrees that a serious breach of discipline will entail exclusion from the union and dismissal from the factory.⁸⁶

An insight into how workers were breaching discipline is provided by the situation at the Putilov works in the winter of 1917. The overthrow of the Kerensky government prompted the works committee to issue a proclamation warning the Putilovtsy against excesses:

Comrades, we are living through the days of a great proletarian-peasant revolution and this obliges each of us to concentrate all our mental and physical energies on iron discipline in order to oppose the intrigues of our enemy. If in normal times organisation, solidarity and inner discipline are as necessary as the air we breathe, then in these days, powerful democratic principles must be strengthened tenfold.

We need discipline of mind and will-power since this can overcome all obstacles and will serve as a powerful binding force in all our organised work. The freedom we have won is the greatest blessing, but to win it is one thing and to use it is another. Above all, freedom obliges each of us to inculcate self-discipline and order in

86. ibid., p.142.

our intellectual and emotional (volevykh) behaviour. Freedom and civic duty demand of us that whenever necessary, without wavering or hesitation, we subordinate our personal interests (which, in any case, have now lost all significance) to the general good of the people.

Regretfully, among comrades there are some (not many, it is true) who understand freedom as licence for their desires, as unruliness, and this always harms the general affairs of the working class. So it is the duty of every comrade to curb and prevent the emergence of licentiousness and unruliness.⁸⁷

Alas, it was not easy to persuade workers whose lives were being racked by soaring inflation, unemployment and food shortages, to remain calm and cool. In the middle of November, the administration boycotted the factory in protest against the activities of the works committee and the engineers went on strike. Some 12,000 workers stayed away from work because there was nothing for them to do. When the works committee managed to secure sixty wagonloads of coal from the Donbass through a 'pusher', it called on the absentee-workers to come to the factory to unload the coal. Only two workers turned up for work; the rest did not bother, since they were already receiving two-thirds their normal pay for being laid off. The works committee decided to take drastic measures by sacking persistent absentees and by cutting off the pay of skilled and semi-skilled workers who refused to do unskilled jobs.⁸⁸ Such harsh measures could do little to attenuate the basic problem, however, which was that there were no orders to fulfil at the factory; even if there had been, there were no fuel or raw materials to carry

87. Gaza, I.I., Putilovets na putyakh k oktyabryu, M.L., 1933, pp. 117-18. He wrongly states that this warning was issued in early December; in fact it dates from 31 October 1917.

88. Gaza, Putilovets v trekh revolyutsiyakh, pp. 428-9.

them out. Moreover the problem was not simply that workers were unwilling to work, but that they frequently were unable to, owing to their drastically deteriorating diet. Rocketing prices and severe food shortages made low-paid workers ever more desperate. By December wildcat strikes and the carting-out of members of management had once again become widespread at Putilov.

At the beginning of December the workers' section of the Petrograd Soviet issued the following plea:

The working class is taking a gigantic step towards socialism by taking control of the economy into its own hands. Consequently, the working class bears great responsibility for the fate of the economy, which is in a catastrophic state. The proletariat must make every effort to overcome economic chaos and industrial ruin. This is possible only on condition that iron proletarian discipline is maintained, for only this will allow the working class to close ranks and strengthen the gains of the proletarian-peasant revolution and thus deal a shattering blow to capital and raise the banner of socialism.⁸⁹

Labour discipline grew steadily worse in the spring of 1918, as factories closed their gates and trains left the capital crammed with workers. Bolshevik labour leaders were caught on the horns of a dilemma: could they restore labour discipline without resorting to capitalist methods? Larin argued that even the most draconian sanctions against workers would make little difference to falling labour productivity, since this was due to starvation rather than indiscipline. He called for higher wages and greater workers' control.⁹⁰ Yet the exchequer was bankrupt and workers' control was

89. Znamya Truda, 90, 8 December 1917, p.4.

90. Lur'e, M., Trudovaya povinnost' i rabochii kontrol', Pg., 1918, p.9.

tending towards atomisation of the productive system. A survey of 27 factories in Petrograd by the Bolshevik economist, S.G. Strumilin, lent support to Larin's diagnosis. He calculated that nearly half the fall in labour productivity was due to sheer physical exhaustion of the workers and only 21% to the decay of discipline and motivation.⁹¹ Most trade union leaders, however, felt that the breakdown of labour discipline reflected a change for the worse in workers' attitudes.

In a speech to the CEC of the Soviets on 20 March Shlyapnikov, the Commissar of Labour, painted a gloomy picture of Moscow railways, where workers were refusing to repair or drive trains now that their wages were guaranteed, and of Petrograd factories, where efforts by factory committees to improve productivity had led to their being dissolved and replaced by representatives more compliant with the wishes of the rank-and-file. He argued that the only solution to the crisis of labour discipline was the abolition of the guaranteed wage and the revival of piece rates. This speech marked a turning-point, for it announced a decree which centralised management on the railways, restored the power of individual administrators and granted 'dictatorial' powers to the Commissariat of Communications.⁹² On 2 April the ARCTU declared that "one of the major causes of the fall in labour productivity is...the lack of any kind of production discipline". It proposed the reintroduction of piece rates, guaranteed norms of output, bonuses and work books

91. Strumilin, S.G., Problemy ekonomiki truda, Izbrannye proizvedeniya, vol. 3, M., 1964, p.361.

92. Carr, E.H., The Bolshevik Revolution, vol. 2, p.395.

in which workers would record their individual productivity. Workers who did not fulfil output norms for three days running would be transferred to a lower category, and if they continued to work below par would be dismissed.⁹³ The ARCTU also proposed sanctions against lateness for work and against meetings during working hours and called on the factory committees to enforce these. A few weeks later the metal union spoke of "the complete indifference on the part of the mass of workers...to the development of production".⁹⁴ It proposed the reintroduction of piece rates and guaranteed norms of output, together with the restoration of technical specialists and administrative personnel.

There was opposition to these proposals from Left Communists and from leading trade unionists such as Ryazanov, but they had the backing of Lenin, who was particularly keen to see the revival of one-man management. The early summer of 1918 saw the widespread implementation of guaranteed norms of outputs, bonus incentives and the 48-hour week. More controversially, the guaranteed wage was abolished, wage differentials were widened and piece rates were revived. The attempt to restore one-man management was begun but took much longer to achieve. Finally, in some factories, production was reorganised on Taylorist lines.⁹⁵

Although it was the trade unions which spearheaded the drive to increase labour discipline and productivity, the factory committees also played their part in the battle to increase output. This had always been a concern of the committees, but now it came to take

93. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 1, 4 May 1918, p.18.

94. Metallist, 5, 22 May 1918, p.9.

95. Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov, 1, p.18 and no. 2, 15 July 1918, p.19.

precedence over their other concerns. Over the summer of 1918 the drive to transform relations of production in the enterprise was overtaken by the drive for greater productivity. Nationalisation was used as the excuse to end attempts to establish workers' power at the point of production. The factory committees' functions were redefined in terms of upholding labour discipline and of passive supervisory 'control'.⁹⁶

It is too simple to say that the movement for workers' self-management was crushed in an effort to raise the level of productive forces. From the first, the factory committees interested themselves in both productivity and self-management, but the conditions for self-management were not favourable and so the factory committees themselves consented to the prioritisation of productivity. Moreover it is too simple to see a straightforward 'bureaucratisation' of the factory committees i.e. the decay of the committees as democratic organs of the working class and their transformation into agencies of the state. From the first, 'bureaucratic' tendencies had coexisted within the committees alongside democratic tendencies. At the very time when the committees were most active in fighting for workers' self-management complaints could be heard that individual committees were behaving in a bureaucratic fashion. As early as autumn 1917, a woman from the Nevka cotton-spinning mill, where 92% of the workforce were women, complained of the behaviour of the overwhelmingly male factory committee:

96. See, for example, the decree of the Council of Trade Unions of the Northern Oblast' of late 1918 (Rabochii Kontrol', pp. 457-8) or the ARCTU decree of August 1918 cited by Pankratova op. cit., pp. 268-8. It should not be assumed that the more radical style of control died the death in 1918. Attempts continued through the Civil War to establish such control, not only by the factory committees, but by some sovnarkhozy and even trade unions. See Bor'yan, B., 'Rabochii Kontrol' 1917-21', Vestnik Truda, 1921, 10-11, p.28.

They (the male factory committee members - SAS) have done a lot to organise the dark mass, but now reveal a desire to concentrate all power in their hands. They are beginning to boss their backward comrades, to act without accountability...They deal with the workers roughly, haughtily, using expressions like 'To the devil's mother with you!'⁹⁷

Later a leather-worker from the Osipov saddle factory wrote to the leatherworkers' newspaper:

...often members of the committees gradually become cut off from the masses, they become alienated from them and lose their confidence. Quite often the masses blame them for becoming autocrats, for taking no account of the mood of the majority of workers, for being too conciliatory (soglashatel'stvo). This, it is true, is explained by the peculiar conditions of the present time, by the acerbity (ozloblennost') of the masses, by their low level of culture; but sometimes the factory committee members themselves provoke such a reaction by their behaviour. They get on their high horse and pay scant attention to the voice of the workers. Sometimes they show little enthusiasm or do very little and this causes discontent among the masses.⁹⁸

As we have seen, complaints about the bureaucratic behaviour of the committees increased in early 1918. The above quotations focus on the personal behaviour of factory committee members who were abusing their authority, but it was not the corrupting effects of power which was the main problem. After October the factory committees became less accountable to their members because they felt themselves to be now also accountable to the soviet state. Most factory committee leaders sincerely believed that the policies of the Bolshevik government were in the interests of the working class, but it was

97. Rabotnitsa, 11, 18 October 1917, p.15.

98. Golos Kozhevnik, 6-7, 25 January 1918, p.18.

not always easy to persuade the workers that this was so. Efforts by the committees to strengthen labour discipline at a time when redundancies and starvation were ravaging working-class life proved particularly unpopular. The committees thus exploited the degree of autonomy of their constituents which they enjoyed, as representative organs, in order to resist what they regarded as dangerous demands from the shop-floor, threatening the security of the revolution. From the beginning of 1918, they began to bypass democratic practices when these seemed to conflict with higher goals. Thus bureaucratic impulses began to overcome democratic impulses, but the victory of the former was by no means guaranteed at the point where we break off our story.

CONCLUSION

We saw in chapter 1 that, contrary to the Soviet stereotype, the industrial working class of Petrograd constituted a complex, highly differentiated social group, distinct from the working class of other countries in its economic, political and cultural formation. This working class came into existence extremely rapidly in conditions of modern large-scale production. It lacked artisanal traditions and was recruited, in the main, direct from the peasantry. It possessed distinct 'peasant' characteristics and fused peasant grievances with working-class grievances.¹ It was a working class which experienced all the horrors of early industrialisation, but in the particular political context of tsarist absolutism. It thus grew up acutely aware of the importance of the political question, strongly influenced by socialist ideas, largely impervious to reformist, economistic or craft ideologies. Within itself, the working class reflected the combined and uneven development characteristic of Russian society as a whole. The working class was differentiated by degree of proletarianisation, skill, sex, age and education. Broadly, however, one can discern two groups in the labour force of Petrograd in 1917: the first consisted of fully-proletarianised, skilled, male workers, who made up about 40% of the workforce (they were 'cadre' workers rather than a 'labour aristocracy'); the second consisted of peasants, women and young

1. Zelni.k, R., 'Russian Workers and the Revolutionary Movement', Journal of Social History, 1972-3, vol. 6, no. 2' Haimson, L., 'The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-17', Slavic Review, 23, no. 4, 1964 and 24, no. 1, 1965.

workers, who made up about 60% of the workforce. The two groups are symbolised by the metalworker and the textileworker, respectively. As early as the 1880's, contemporaries had discussed the two social types and speculated on the revolutionary potential of each. For Plekhanov, father of Russian marxism, it was the zavodskie i.e. those who worked in the zavody or metal works, who would provide the basis of the revolutionary movement because of their greater proletarianisation, education and leisure time.² For Kropotkin, the father of Russian anarchism, the zavodskie were basically reformist, not revolutionary; he believed that it was the fabrichnie i.e. those who worked in fabriki or textile mills, whose spontaneous militancy would spark off the social revolution.³

The experience of 1917 showed that the two groups played different but complementary roles. Both developed a revolutionary political consciousness, but each in different ways. Although the problem is beyond the scope of the present work, it is arguable that the success of the Bolsheviks lay largely in the fact that they, alone of the left parties, managed to relate to both groups in their agitation and propaganda. Certainly, we have seen that both groups had a different relationship to the organised labour movement. The latter - in the shape of the trade unions and factory committees - was built and staffed by skilled, proletarianised male workers in their twenties and thirties. Workers new to industry i.e. women, peasants and youths, did not automatically begin to organise themselves after the February Revolution. They were driven

2. Plekhanov, G., Russkii rabochii v revolyutsionnom dvizhenii, Geneva 1892, p.15.

3. Kropotkin, P., Memoirs of a Revolutionist, ed. Rodgers, J.A., New York, 1962, p.218.

into struggle by economic developments, but their struggle tended to be spontaneously militant - successful in the spring, but increasingly less so thereafter. In the later stage of this struggle, they developed a level of political consciousness and moved into the orbit of the organised labour movement. The leaders of the labour movement endeavoured to direct the militancy of the new workers into organised channels, focussing and controlling it. Much of the momentum of the labour movement - particularly in the battle for collective wage contracts, but also in the struggle for workers' control - was provided by the new workers, but at times their militancy threatened to undermine organisation and the projects of the labour leaders. The latter believed that it was only through organisation that the democratic will of all workers could be expressed on a durable basis, and they aspired to involve all workers in the activities of the factory committees and trade unions. At the same time, however, in controlling the militancy of the rank-and-file, they ran the risk of dominating them. Thus at the heart of the labour movement was a tension between democracy and bureaucracy. In late 1917, as the economic crisis reached catastrophic proportions, poverty, unemployment and starvation bred discontents in the remnants of the working class which the labour leaders sought to control by means of manipulative and bureaucratic methods. Bureaucratic elements came to overshadow democratic elements and a process of bureaucratisation got underway whereby some of the labour leaders evolved into state apparatchiks. This process was only in its very early stages by the time the Civil War broke out, however, and was by no means irreversible.

The relationship of the factory committees to the trade unions was a complicated one. Factory committees were undoubtedly more powerful than the unions in 1917, as they were closer to the mass of workers and represented all workers in the workplace. The trade unions were less popular as a result of their greater distance from the mass of workers, who were members of the unions but not actively involved in them. The factory committees were first to register the growing radicalisation of feeling at shop-floor level. It was in the committees, rather than in the soviets or trade unions, that the Bolsheviks first came to enjoy majority support. The Petrograd trade unions and soviets came under Bolshevik control, but more gradually. The Bolsheviks did not cynically use the committees in order to win power, and then discard them in favour of the unions. The Bolshevik party had no clear position on the role of the factory committees: the leaders of the committees, almost all of them Bolsheviks, argued with Bolshevik trade union leaders as to the respective merits of both organisations. Lenin was generally sympathetic to the committees, but did not take sides in the debate about the respective role of each organisation until after October. As the economic crisis worsened, he came to feel that the committees were not suitable vehicles for centralising economic activity and swung in favour of subordinating the committees to the unions. This was possible only because the unions adopted the perspective of the committees, seeing their main task as that of regulating the economy (with the ultimate aim of socialising it), rather than of defending workers' economic interests.

We have seen that it is impossible to understand the development of the Russian Revolution except in the context of economic crisis. In this context the October Revolution appears as an important political turning-point, but does not signify a rupture in social development. Up to October the economic crisis worked in favour of the Bolsheviks, since it convinced the mass of workers that only a radical change in the form of government could effect a decisive betterment in their position. After October, however, the economic crisis continued to get worse and came to work against the Bolsheviks' interests - the battered state of the productive forces vitiating attempts at socialist reorganisation of the economy.

The initial response to the economic crisis on the part of the workers was to strike for higher wages to beat inflation. This struggle was subsequently coordinated by the trade unions into the campaign for collective wage contracts. By summer, however, it was becoming clear that wages struggles were no longer very effective and they were superseded by the new struggle to control production. The latter, far from being an experiment in syndicalism, was a practical response to economic crisis - an attempt to maintain production and thus to preserve jobs. However the February Revolution had precipitated a move to democratise the factories - in reaction to the despotism of the tsarist enterprise - and in time this impulse to democratisation meshed with attempts to maintain production. By October, under the impact of the Bolshevik seizure of power and deepening industrial turmoil, the movement led by the factory committees had come to pose the twin aims of nationalisation and workers' self-management. Self-management was never a clearly

formulated goal of the committees, but in practice this was how they envisaged running the factories under a centrally-planned socialist economy. Although the movement for workers' control sometimes flowed in the direction of anarchistic factory seizures or factory committee parochialism—especially in the provinces—in Petrograd the movement was far more organised and the few factory take-overs were attempts to force the government to nationalise the factories - something it was reluctant to do until June 1918.

For the Bolshevik government by the spring of 1918, the main priority seemed to be to avert total economic ruin and mass starvation. This involved rebuilding the country's productive forces, but they felt that attempts at self-management conflicted with this priority. The obvious question which arises (and which has been the subject of much debate on the Left in recent years) is: were they right? Was workers' self-management incompatible with the task of increasing production?

By the spring of 1918 Lenin was haunted by the fact that the economic infrastructure of socialism did not exist in Russia. The political superstructure was there in the shape of a soviet government, but not the material base. This existed only in Western Europe - above all, in Germany. This led him to observe that:

History has taken such a peculiar course that it has given birth to two unconnected halves of socialism, existing side by side like two future chickens in a single shell of international imperialism. In 1918 Germany has become the most striking embodiment of the material realisation of the economic, productive and socio-economic conditions for

socialism, on the one hand, and the Russia the embodiment of the political conditions on the other.⁴

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signalled the fact that revolution would not break out immediately in Germany and thus every effort had to be made to build up the productive forces of Russia in the meantime. As Lenin argued:

The task of the day is to restore the productive forces destroyed by the war and by bourgeois rule; to heal the wounds inflicted by the war and by the defeat in the war, by profiteering and the attempts of the bourgeoisie to restore the overthrown rule of the exploiters; to achieve economic revival; to provide reliable protection of elementary order. It may sound paradoxical, but in fact, considering the objective conditions mentioned, it is absolutely certain that at the present moment the Soviet system can secure Russia's transition to socialism only if these very elementary, extremely elementary problems of maintaining public life are practically solved.⁵

This meant first and foremost raising the productivity of labour.

The Russian is a bad worker in comparison with the advanced nations...To learn to work is the task which the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope.⁶

This meant the restoration of 'iron discipline' in the workplace, through the revival of piece work, productivity deals, one-man management, etc.

4. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 36, 5th edn., M., 1962, p.300. For a good discussion of Lenin's thinking at this time see Rancière, J., La leçon d'Althusser, Paris, 1974, pp. 186-8.

5. Lenin, V.I., Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 36, pp. 173-4.

6. ibid., p.189.

Implicit within the movement for workers' control was the recognition that capitalist methods cannot be used for socialist ends. The factory committees in their fight to democratise the factory had become aware, in a necessarily partial and groping way, that within the enterprise, capitalist relations were continually reproduced through the technical division of labour, the hierarchical organisation of the enterprise and the separation of mental and manual labour. Marx had argued that within the labour process labour power and the means of production are combined in various forms under the command of capital, but this insight had been lost by the theoreticians of the Second International. The factory committees rediscovered and deepened this insight in the course of their battle against capitalist control of production, coming to recognise that socialism must entail the transformation of production processes and thereby of the social and technical division of labour which constitutes a basis for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Yet Lenin remained blind to this insight. He was not alarmed by the resuscitation of capitalist methods of labour discipline, for he believed that the transition to socialism was determined by the proletarian character of the state rather than by self-management by the direct producers.

Maurice Brinton, the libertarian critic of Bolshevism, has exposed the inadequacy of his conception:

None of them (i.e. the Bolshevik leaders, SAS) saw the proletarian nature of the Russian regime as primarily and crucially dependent on the exercise of workers' power at the point of production (i.e. on workers' management of

production). It should have been obvious to them as Marxists that if the working class did not hold economic power, its 'political' power would at best be insecure and would in fact soon degenerate. The Bolshevik leaders saw the capitalist organisation of production as something which, in itself, was socially neutral. It could be used indifferently for bad purposes (as when the bourgeoisie used it with the aim of promoting private accumulation) or good ones (as when the 'workers' state used it 'for the benefit of many').⁷

This critique is absolutely on target. There is no doubt that Lenin did conceive proletarian power in terms of the soviet state and lacked any conception of localising such power at the point of production.⁸

A more far-reaching critique of Bolshevik strategy at this time has been developed by writers of Maoist persuasion - principally, the French economist Charles Bettelheim. He argues that the Bolsheviks were wrong to believe that the possibility of socialist advance is, in any sense, determined by the level of productive forces. He follows Mao Ze Dong in arguing that the transformation of relations of production clears the way for the development of productive

7. Brinton, M., The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917-21, London: Solidarity publication, 1970, p.42. Incidentally it is too simple to say that Lenin regarded capitalist methods of organising production as 'socially neutral'. He considered them to be 'capitalist', but justified by circumstances.
8. As usual it is Trotsky who attempts to make a virtue out of this particular shortcoming. In Terrorism and Communism (1920) he argues (rather ferociously): 'It would be a most crying error to confuse the question of boards of workers at the head of factories with the question of the supremacy of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole Soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers, and not at all in the form in which economic enterprises are administered' (my emphasis). Trotsky, L., Terrorism and Communism, London, 1975, p.170.

forces.⁹ He contends that because the Bolsheviks - with the heroic exception of Lenin, whom he unwarrantedly excludes from his strictures - erroneously believed that the level of productive forces dictates the possibilities of socialist advance, they subordinated the transformation of capitalist social relations to the drive to increase industrial output. The absence of a strategy for transforming production, political and ideological relations meant that output increased within a framework of capitalist rather than socialist relations. The capitalist division of labour and the ideological and political relations which are an effect of this division, were constantly reproduced, thus paving the way, Bettelheim avers, for the restoration of a 'state bourgeoisie'.

There is much in Bettelheim's stimulating critique with which one can agree. The Bolshevik strategy of transition did indeed centre on building the 'economic base' ("socialism equals electrification plus soviet power"), with little attention being paid to transforming capitalist social relations. But in denying that the level of productive forces exercises a constraint on the possibilities of socialist advance, Bettelheim is guilty of the grossest voluntarism. The implication of his argument is that the degeneration of the Russian Revolution was the consequence of a theoretical error ("economism"). Although he mentions the intractable economic and

9. Bettelheim, C., Class Struggles in the USSR: first period, 1917-23. Brighton: Harvester, 1977, p.42. Mao's argument can be found in Mao Tse Tung, A Critique of Soviet Economics, London 1977, esp. p.51.

social circumstances in which the Bolsheviks found themselves, they do not function as part of the explanation of the degeneration of the revolution.

A satisfactory examination of the theoretical relationship of forces of production to relations of production, would take us into rarefied spheres well outside the scope of this work. Marx centrally assumed that the creation of socialist relations of production was possible only on the basis of a certain level of productive forces; but his treatment of this question is by no means unproblematical - not least, because his concept of the 'productive forces' at times smacks of technological determinism. This led the Second International to interpret the question in a way that was unambiguously technological-determinist. Theoreticians such as Kautsky conceived the 'productive forces' as technology and the ever-growing scale of production. They argued that these, being social in character, would come into ever-increasing conflict with the constricting mode of appropriation based on private ownership. The productive forces would eventually burst the fetters of private ownership, but, after a socialist government came to power, would provide the material base for a socialist reorganisation of society. Lenin's thinking on economic matters was strongly influenced by this interpretation, in spite of his commitment to the possibility of a socialist revolution in backward Russia.

In Marx's writings, however, one can find an alternative conception of 'productive forces' which does not reduce them to brute technology or productive capacity. This conceives the productive

forces as embracing the whole gamut of the means of production and reproduction of social life. It thus includes not merely types of industrial and agricultural production, but modes of social cooperation, the application of social knowledge and cultural forms.¹⁰

Above all, Marx sees the principal productive force as being the working class itself.¹¹ In the light of this broader conception it becomes possible to understand why Marx believed that socialist construction was possible only with a certain level of development of productive forces.

In the first place, and most obviously, since he considered socialism to be the self-emancipation of the working class, socialism was a theoretical impossibility unless the chief productive force i.e. the industrial working class itself, was fully developed. Secondly, he argued that if a socialist revolution were not underpinned by an adequate level of productive forces: "want is merely made general and, with destitution, the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business is necessarily reproduced".¹² Engels explained that it is precisely the 'struggle for necessities' which is at the root of class society:

10. This is well-discussed by Corrigan, P., Ramsay, H. and Sayer, D., Socialist Construction and Marxist Theory, London: Macmillan, 1978, pp. 3-4, though they draw exactly opposite conclusions to my own and, incidentally, tend to conflate the concepts of 'forces of production' and 'social relations of productions'. See too Williams, R., Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 90-94.

11. See Marx, K., Capital, vol. 1, Penguin, 1976, pp. 928-9. As Cutler et al. show, however, even this passage is not free of a certain economic determinism, Cutler, A., Hindess, B., Hirst, P. and Hussain, A., Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today, vol. 1, London: Routledge, 1977, pp. 148-153.

12. Marx, K. and Engels, F., The German Ideology, ed. Arthur, C.J., New York: International, 1970, p.56.

The separation of society into an exploiting and an exploited class, a ruling and an oppressed class was the necessary consequence of the deficient and restricted development of production in former times. So long as the total social labour only yields a produce which but slightly exceeds that barely necessary for all; so long, therefore, as labour engages all or almost all of the time of the great majority of the members of society - so long, of necessity, this society is divided into classes.¹³

This was the crux of the matter for Marx and Engels: they regarded socialism as the entry into freedom, not a struggle for survival. Socialism could be built only in a society ruled directly by the working people, which meant a big reduction in necessary labour time, which was possible only with industrial and agricultural development, advanced modes of social cooperation, application of social knowledge and complex cultural forms.

With this in mind, it becomes possible to understand the unenviable situation in which the Bolsheviks found themselves in 1918. The destroyed state of productive forces meant that the struggle for survival became the priority of the government. Efforts to transform relations of production conflicted with this priority and may even have exacerbated economic chaos. By 1918 it had become apparent that the twin aims of the factory committees of 1917 - raising the level of productive forces via a centralised planned economy and workers' self-management - were incompatible in a war-torn country. Only a revolution in Germany could have rescued the factory committee project, but in the event, it never

13. Engels, F., Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, Marx-Engels Selected Works, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968, pp1 424-5.

came. Brinton and Bettelheim are correct to point out that the Bolsheviks underestimated the importance of consciously transforming relations of production, but there is no evidence to suggest that the transformation of the relations of production could have brought socialism regardless of the general level of productive forces. The Russian experience of 1917-18 suggests that democratic socialism failed, not because of short-sighted policies of the Bolsheviks, but because the task of dragging the country out of poverty, ruin and squalor necessitated types of compulsion which proved incompatible with workers' self-management. Greater awareness of the importance of workers' self-management on the part of the Bolshevik leadership might have helped it survive longer than it did; but workers' self-management could not survive amid hunger and unemployment. To that extent, the Soviet government was right to prioritise the raising of the productive forces. Unfortunately, the use of short-term capitalist methods of compulsion did undermine the long-term goal of socialism. The history of workers' control in Russia in the period 1917-18, therefore, seems merely to reaffirm a truth which was discovered by Marx and Engels viz. that democratic socialism, involving workers' self-management, cannot be created in a single country, which is economically, socially and culturally impoverished.

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2. Archives

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| fond 1229 | Factory Inspectorate of Petrograd guberniya |
| fond 1333 | Company Accounts of the Cable Works |
| fond 1357 | Petrograd Metal Works |
| fond 1278 | Kersten knitwear factory |
| fond 416 | Baltic works: proceedings of conciliation committee |
| fond 1304 | Baltic works: works committee |
| fond 1477 | 1835 Gas Light Company |
| fond 1182 | Nevskaya footwear factory |
| fond 1186 | Pechatkin paper mill |

3. Newspapers

i. The Petrograd Socialist Press, 1917-18

<u>Delo naroda</u>	organ of	Central Committee of SR party
<u>Den'</u>		Right-wing Mensheviks
<u>Edinstvo</u>		Plekhanov's supporters
<u>Golos anarkhista</u>		Anarchists
<u>Golos bunda</u>		Central Committee of the Jewish Bund
<u>Golos rabotnitsy</u>		Menshevik paper for working women
<u>Golos sotsial-demokrata</u>		SD Internationalists
<u>Golos truda</u>		Anarcho-syndicalists
<u>Izvestiya</u>		EC of Petrograd Soviet
<u>Izvestiya raionnogo komiteta</u> <u>Petrogradskoi Storony</u>		Menshevik party committee of Petrograd district
<u>Kommuna</u>		Anarchists
<u>Kommunist</u>		Left Communists
<u>Narodnoe slovo*</u>		Popular Socialists
<u>Novyi den'</u>		Right-wing Mensheviks
<u>Partiinye Izvestiya</u>		Menshevik internal organ
<u>Petrogradskaya pravda</u>		North-West oblast' bureau of Central Committee and Petrograd guberniya committee of Bolshevik party
<u>Petrogradskii rabochii</u>		SR (centre)
<u>Plamya</u>		Menshevik
<u>Pravda*</u>		Central Committee of Bolshevik party
<u>Rabochaya gazeta</u>		Central Committee of Menshevik party
<u>Rabotnitsa</u>		Bolshevik paper for working women
<u>Shchit</u>		Central Committee of Menshevik party
<u>Trud i volya</u>		Trudoviks
<u>Volya naroda</u>		Right SR's
<u>Volya Truda</u>		SR Maximalists
<u>Yunii proletarii</u>		Socialist Union of Young Workers
<u>Zemlya i volya</u>		Petrograd oblast' committee of SR's
<u>Znamya Truda</u>		Left SR's

* denotes that the paper came out under several different titles.

Newspapers cont.

ii. The Petrograd Trade-Union Press, 1917-18

<u>Bor'ba</u>	organ of	Industrial and commercial <u>sluzhashchie</u>
<u>Ekho derevoobdelochnika</u>		Wood workers
<u>Golos chertezhnika</u>		Draughtsmen
<u>Golos kozhevnika</u>		Leatherworkers
<u>Gudok</u>		Railway workers of Petrograd-Moscow junction
<u>Izvestiya TsIK soyuza Petrogradskoi seti Moskovskoi-Vindavo-Rybinskoi zheleznoi dorogi</u>		
<u>Kontorskii trud</u>		Clerical workers
<u>Metallist</u>		Metalworkers
<u>Mysli zheleznodorozhnika</u>		Railway workers of Nikolaev line
<u>Nabat</u>		Foodworkers
<u>Nashe slovo</u>		Catering workers
<u>Novyi put'</u>		Printers
<u>Pischebumazhnik</u>		Paperworkers
<u>Pochtovo-Telegrafnyi tribun</u>		Post-Office employees
<u>Professional'nyi Soyuz</u>		Menshevik trade-union journal
<u>Professional'nyi Vestnik</u>		All-Russian Council of Trade Unions
<u>Proletarii igly</u>		Needleworkers
<u>Proletarskii prizyv</u>		Glassworkers
<u>Rabochii kooperator</u>		Workers' consumer cooperatives
<u>Rabotnik vodnogo transporta</u>		Waterway employees
<u>Revolutsionnyi pechatnik</u>		Internationalist printers
<u>Stroitel'</u>		Construction workers
<u>Tkach</u>		Textile workers
<u>Trud</u>		Predecessor to <u>Rabochii kooperator</u>
<u>Trudorezina</u>		Rubber workers (mainly the Triangle Works)
<u>Vestnik aptechnogo truda</u>		Pharmacy employees
<u>Vestnik kustarnoi promyshlennosti</u>		Bureau of All-Russian Congresses of Artisans
<u>Vestnik metallista</u>		Temporary Central Committee of national metalworkers' union
<u>Vestnik professional'nykh soyuzov</u>		Petrograd Council of Trade Unions
<u>Zerno pravdy</u>		Predecessor to <u>Nabat</u>
<u>Zhizn' farmatsevt</u>		Predecessor to <u>Vestnik aptechnogo truda</u>

Newspapers cont.

iii. Miscellaneous

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